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CONVERSION TO JUDAISM

A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS

EDITED BY

DAVID MAX EICHHORN

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FOREWORD

The primary purpose of this book is to present basic historical and contemporary data on the subject of conversion to Judaism.

The first section of the book is devoted to a presentation of references to this subject in Jewish classical sources from Biblical times to the present. This section also contains accounts of many instances of individual and group conversions to Judaism which have occurred down through the centuries.

The second section contains analyses of the phenomenon of conversion to Judaism by a psychiatrist, a sociologist and a theologian.

In the third and final section, a number of contemporary converts to Judaism tell how and why they accepted the Jewish religion and what have been the results of their years of living as Jews.

Each contributor to this book is responsible only for what he has written. Therefore, the reader should not be surprised if, in the course of his reading, he discovers that an opinion expressed by one contributor may differ somewhat from that expressed by another. In compiling and editing this work, no effort of any kind was made to have the contributors adhere to any predetermined or uniform position. Every writer speaks only for himself.

It happens frequently that different human beings reach quite different conclusions from a study of the same set of facts. This is good. This makes life more complicated but also much more interesting. Basic to such a situation, however, is the proposition that before one attempts to reach an intelligent decision he must be quite sure that he has the proper information. Until now, with regard to the subject of conversion to Judaism, there have been far too many people who have been much too willing and eager to express themselves forcefully on this subject without having in their possession either a knowledge or a grasp of the pertinent

facts. It is hoped that this book will help to create a more intelligent approach to an important area of religious concern.

THE EDITOR
March 15, 1965

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INTRODUCTION

by

DAVID MAX EICHHORN

There is currently a great interest in the matter of the conversion of non-Jews to Judaism. The interest is due largely to the publicity given the conversion of a number of prominent Hollywood personalities. The highly publicized marital misadventures of a few of these more-to-be-pitied-than-scorned movie idols have seemed to confirm the commonly accepted Jewish folk tales that Judaism has never, does not now and should not ever seek converts, and that converts to Judaism are, in the main, a liability rather than an asset to our religion.

There are also some Jews who still believe that, if we try to convert non-Jews, this gives the Christian an excuse for trying to convert us—and who hope that if we do not try to convert those not of our faith then they will stop trying to convert us. Such hopes are futile. Those who still cling to the belief that the man Jesus was actually part of the Godhead and that through him the world is to be redeemed and that he was and still is rejected by his own people, the Jewish people, cannot, nay, dare not cease trying to persuade us that we are wrong and they are right. Were the Christian world, at long last, to admit defeat in this spiritual struggle, that part of its theological system which is uniquely and distinctly Christian would quickly disappear from the contemporary religious scene.

The ethics of Christianity stem from Judaism. There is no great difference between what Christianity and Judaism teach about the

relationship of man to man. For that matter, the ethics of Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and other universal religions do not differ markedly from the Judeo-Christian ethic. It is in the realm of theology, the beliefs about God and the relation of God to man, that traditional Christian and learned Jew part company. The many who call themselves Christian but who have given up completely the traditional Christian theology and define Christianity mainly in terms of ethical conduct are already well along on the road to Judaism, even though most of them do not yet realize this.

The conviction that there are millions of non-Jews who are spiritually homeless because they can no longer accept the theological teachings of fundamentalist minister or dogmatic priest; the conviction that the world desperately needs an acceptable intellectual and spiritual "third force" to save it from catastrophe in the present mad race between the dialectically material East and the monopolistically material West; the conviction that Judaism, rightly understood by both Jew and non-Jew, has the capability of becoming an important part of this "third force"—these convictions have impelled many Jews in our time to rethink the whole matter of conversionist activity in Judaism, to restudy the past, and to plan earnestly for the future. These Jews have not been moved one way or the other by titillating newspaper headlines. Many of them know little about the activities of the Hollywood set and care less. Their concern is with something much more important, much more significant, much more challenging. They believe that the time has come for our people to teach the world the Divine truths received and developed over the centuries by prophet and sage, truths which mirror where man really stands in relation to God, truths which, if accepted and heeded by mankind, may keep the human race from incinerating itself.

Just when and where did this most recent form of an ancient belief—the belief of the Jew that he belongs to a God-chosen people with a God-given mission—begin to assert itself? That is difficult to state exactly. It had its genesis in the situation created by the Nazi terror and it came to full bloom in the years after the establishment of the State of Israel. No one person or group of

persons deserves major credit for kindling the flame. Individual rabbis and learned laymen, in Israel and in the United States, seem to have reached the same set of conclusions at about the same time and quite independently of each other. These conclusions are:

Judaism, by its very nature, is, and for a long time actively was, a proselytizing religion. This missionary activity was halted and interdicted in the early Middle Ages by the Christians and the Muslims, both of whom realized that, as long as their old spiritual mother was alive, respected and active, they would never obtain universal acceptance for their own respective "divine revelations." Over the centuries, Jews stopped seeking converts overtly, not because their religious outlook had changed but because, whenever and wherever medieval Christian and Muslim authorities learned of a conversion to Judaism, both convertor and proselyte were promptly arrested, imprisoned and, more often than not, tortured to death.

This adverse situation no longer exists. The Jew is now free to resume a program of propagandizing for and proselytizing to his faith, if he so desires. And he should so desire, especially in the light of prevailing world conditions, the apparent inability of Christianity and Communism to meet the spiritual needs and aspirations of the awakening masses, the intense missionary campaigns that are being waged throughout the world by Buddhism and Islam. Now that the State of Israel is a reality and Jewish courage and determination have shown that a dream can come true, the Jews of Israel and the rest of the world should unite in the common task of convincing all who will listen that acceptance of Judaism's Divine truths will help to rescue mankind from the material quicksand into which both its body and spirit are slowly sinking. Perhaps the determined efforts of unselfish, truly peace loving and intelligent Buddhists, Muslims and Jews (at the philosophic level, the three of them speak essentially the same spiritual language) will be able to create a "third force" which will prevent the seemingly inevitable atomization awaiting humanity if the struggle between the Christian and the Communist worlds con-

tinues on its present bitter and uncompromising course.

The more fainthearted among our brethren will be appalled and frightened by some of the foregoing statements. "Goodness gracious," they will say, "will not the Gentiles be offended by such honest thinking? Will not these sentiments intensify the anti-Jewish prejudices of the non-Jewish world?" Such timid souls should give careful attention to a statement made in my presence by a prominent Protestant minister:

An effort on the part of American Jews to convert American non-Jews to Judaism would do more, in my opinion, to eliminate anti-Jewish feelings in the United States than any other single step that the American Jewish community has taken or might take to achieve this end. How could any sincere Christian possibly object to such an effort? With the sole exception of Judaism, all the major universal faiths seek to win adherents by missionary efforts of many kinds. Some Jews may regard this lack of conversionist activity as a sign of Jewish spiritual strength but believing Christians do not so regard it. They look upon it as a certain indication of spiritual weakness. They think that it betokens, in the Jew, either a feeling of racial or spiritual superiority and clannishness or a lack of pride and a lack of sincere belief in his religion or a combination of a number of these factors. I am a loyal and faithful member of my particular Christian denomination. I have no desire or intention to convert to Judaism. But I certainly want to feel that I am of sufficient worth and importance in the eyes of the Jews for them to want me to join their ranks, even though the possibility of my ever doing so is very slight indeed.

It may come as a bit of a shock to some whose best friends are Christians to learn that this is the manner of thinking of many of these friends.

* * * *

Time and circumstance have so conditioned the automatic mental reflexes of many Jews that they think that "conversion" is a naughty and nasty word. This is unfortunate because "conversion" is one of the most profound and meaningful words in the vocabulary of religion. It is the word used to describe the process through which a person abandons a religion with which he happens to be identified by the mere accident of birth and, sincerely and voluntarily

and unconditionally, accepts the teachings and practices of another religion because he has come to believe in its teachings and he wishes to follow its practices. Sometimes the convert is one who, up to this period in his life, has had no religious experience of any kind and now, for the first time, finds inspiration and comfort within the hallowed walls of a particular spiritual structure. Sometimes he has walked the long and hard road from the blind acceptance of childhood to adolescent doubt to adult disbelief to gnawing spiritual loneliness and insecurity to agonizing spiritual reappraisal and search to mature discovery and faith and acceptance and serenity.

By whatever way and under whatever circumstances the genuine conversion is achieved, it outweighs, in ethical and spiritual significance, any other experience which may be labelled "religious." Many so-called conversions are, of course, not conversions at all. They are not entered into maturely, genuinely and sincerely. They are false conversions. They are fraudulent conversions. They are tainted with hypocrisy and/or coercion. A forced conversion which is a required prelude to marriage is not a genuine conversion. A conversion which is connected, in any way, with any sort of material advantage is not a genuine conversion. The only type of conversion which possesses spiritual importance and lasting value is that in which the act is completely voluntary and completely sincere. Jewish classical literature and Jewish traditional law are crystal clear on this point.

The Jew has a basic difficulty with the words "convert" and "conversion." These words are derived from a Latin root which means to change from one way of life to another. Borrowed from the non-Jewish environment by the Anglo-Jewish community, these words, when applied to Jewish values and points of view, create confusion. They do not describe accurately what happens when a non-Jew is received into the Jewish fold. Such a person does not change his religious way of life; he enriches the way of life he already has. He enriches it by becoming part of the Jewish people. He does not become a Jew by a sudden flash of Divine inspiration, by acknowledging that he has been a sinner and now

he has been "saved." Recognizing the truths of Judaism is not a sudden, emotional, traumatic experience. It takes a long time, much study, much intelligence, genuine maturity, genuine conviction. After a non-Jew has filled himself with the intellectual strength and beauty of Judaism, he wants to become a member of the Jewish people, he wants to become part of the group which believes it has been chosen (either Divinely or self-chosen) to bring this strength and beauty to all mankind. The Hebrew word *ger*, which, for want of a more understandable word, we translate as *convert*, does not mean convert at all. It means "someone who has come to live with us," someone who has come voluntarily from the outside to cast his lot with us. The Hebrew verbal root *l'gayer* does not mean *to convert*. It means "to invite a non-Jew to become a member of the Jewish people."

Most Jews will agree that, when non-Jews come voluntarily and sincerely ask to be admitted to the Jewish religious fellowship, they should be accepted. Most will make an effort to treat the convert as the equal of the born Jew. But many will not succeed too well. Fifteen hundred years of religious and social ostracism and oppression have left wounds that are deep and painful. The day when the convert to Judaism will be given a warm welcome by every person in the Jewish community is a long time off. The evil effects of fifteen hundred bitter years cannot be washed away in fifteen hundred days or even in fifteen hundred months.

This regrettable situation is a direct consequence of the mistreatment which the Jew endured at the hands of hostile Christian and Muslim, a direct result of the barbarous methods used by medieval bigots in their vain attempts to force the Jewish people to give up its ancient faith. These tragic historical experiences have had the effect of making many Jews suspicious of all converts—both the non-Jew who wishes to convert to Judaism and the Jew who wishes to free himself of his Jewish religious ties. They have also had another harmful effect: Many Jews have come to believe that all conversionist efforts are wrong. They would be delighted if all religions were to abandon, completely and immediately, all efforts to win new adherents. Jews who hold this point of view

regard the religious urge to expand and to convert as being more than merely undesirable; it is looked upon as being almost sinful. This, too, is an end product of fifteen centuries of being segregated and persecuted, of being robbed, raped and murdered by those who did violence to Jewish bodies under the pretense of seeking to save Jewish souls.

There is a brighter side to the picture, a much brighter side. The convert has entered the household of Israel. He has faced the suspicious glances of some members of the household, that glance which seems to say: "Why did you do it? What do you hope to gain? Who, in his right mind, not having been born a Jew, would elect to become one?" He ignores the glances and lives his religious life as a Jew, calmly, sincerely, contentedly. What happens? A few years go by. Most of the Jews he has met have made him feel at home right from the very beginning. But what of those who have not? They watch him closely. They see that he is sincere and dedicated to his new faith, that he knows more about it and practices it more conscientiously than do they. Gradually their coldness thaws. Gradually they begin to feel ashamed of themselves. Ultimately, the convert wins their complete acceptance and respect. Ultimately they brag, joyously and unashamedly, about their beloved *ger* who has contributed immeasurably to the honor of their religious household and the enrichment of their lives.

* * * *

We shall now begin a journey through the annals of Jewish history to learn what they have to tell us about conversion to Judaism. Then, after we have examined many varieties of evidence—historical, psychological, sociological and theological—we shall meet with a group of converts who will tell us why they became Jews and why they have remained Jews. May you find this journey an intriguing and rewarding experience from beginning to end!

CHAPTER ONE

CONVERSION TO JUDAISM IN BIBLE TIMES

by

ALBERT S. GOLDSTEIN

A sensible immigrant anywhere will normally accommodate himself to local custom. Unsubtle natives often demand such conformity, or else. Even cultured citizens regard it as a polite compliment. In either case, the newcomer's speedy recognition of the beauty and wisdom of one's traditional ways is taken as a mark of the foreigner's perceptiveness and good taste. It is also a bid for warmer welcome and for better odds in favor of smooth integration.

To the natives of ancient Israel, even such mundane matters as what one ate (and when) or wore; how one plowed, planted, reaped, or built a house, came under priestly regulation, was declared to be the law of Israel's God. Could the nice foreigner, eager to be the tactful guest, avoid involvement then in what we could call his hosts' religion? It would not be easy. Perhaps he preferred participation. In that case he might come to share the natives' conviction that, for whatever success he enjoyed, he was beholden to their God whose "client" he had now become.

"Client" is a technical term for such a guest. The Hebrews had their own word for him—*ger*. Though most English versions of the Bible inveterately translate this word as "stranger," it often signifies "proselyte." For the utter alien whose dissociation from Israel's faith and fashion of life was total, Scripture employs more precise designations, such as the Hebrew words *ben nechar*, *nachri*, *zar*, and *acher*.

The *ger* was to some degree incorporated in the community of Israel. This, as we have noted, implied religious affiliation. The

varying degrees of affiliation were not clearly defined or categorized in Biblical antiquity. That came later.

Regardless of where he originated or what his ancestral faith, elementary morality was expected of every resident in ancient Israel. Monotheism might appeal to one ger; another might enjoy the Sabbath of the Hebrews or their holy dietary regimen but entertain reservations about circumcision. However, if and when a ger assumed all the group obligations—ethical, ethnic and ecclesiastic—he became a full-fledged member of the congregation of Israel and his progeny were legally indistinguishable from other Israelites.

Converts were probably not attracted to the religion of Israel primarily by its rituals. They might have been if these had been sacraments—as in the mystery cults and later in Christianity. Israel's religion offered no magical means of redemption; never claimed "no salvation outside this church." What then did appeal to men who had outgrown paganism? The purity of Israel's God-concept; its freedom from idolatry, image worship and adoration of saints; its sublime ethics; its rational hopes for the future; its faith in such a Kingdom of God as, under His guidance, men of flesh and blood could build on earth.

For the enlightened heathen seeking Israel's God, an ancient Temple prayer requests His gracious concern, expressing the trust that thus others may similarly be drawn to Him

As for the alien who does not belong to Thy people Israel, but who comes from a distant land for Thy sake (for men shall hear of Thy great fame . . .), when he comes and turns in prayer toward this temple, then do Thou hearken to this alien's petition . . . so that all nations in the world may learn what Thou art and worship Thee as does Thy people Israel. (I Kings 8:41 ff.)

One alien from a distant land was the Syrian general, Naaman. He came not, it is true, to the temple of God, but to the "man of God," Elisha, asking a cure for his leprosy. His mission accomplished, he confessed

Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. (II Kings 5:15)

Elisha did not seek in any way to persuade Naaman to become a proselyte. The prophet merely accepted his simple promise of fealty to God and blessed him at their leave-taking.

When, long centuries later, a Gospel writer, ignoring his master's rule against anger and abusive name-calling, raged

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you scour sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he is converted you make him a son of hell twice as bad as yourselves. (Matthew 23:15)

hidden in his haystack of hyperbole was one slim needle of truth. Converts were always welcome in Israel.

Did the New Testament add anything to human thought when it stated

God shows no partiality, but welcomes the man of any nation who reveres Him and does what is right. (Acts 10:35) ?

Had not Amos said the same eight hundred fifty years earlier?

"Think you, O Israelites, that you are better to Me than the Ethiopians?" God asks. "I brought up Israel from Egypt? Yes, and also the Philistines from Crete and the Arameans from Kir." (Amos 9:7)

Later, but still many centuries before the earliest writings of the New Testament, Isaiah said

Israel shall with Egypt and Assyria form a triple alliance, a blessing to the world around and blessed by God Who said, "Blessed be Egypt, My people; Assyria, the work of My hands; and Israel, My heritage." (Isaiah 19:24f.)

In order for the reader to feel the full force of Isaiah's prophecy, let him imagine some eminent divine today proclaiming, "Blessed is Russia, God's people; Red China, the work of His hands; and America, His heritage." This does put some strain on the imagination. Yet Isaiah dared. Israel's prophets happened really to believe that we have indeed all one Father. The spirit of these prophets pervades the entire Torah, the entire Pentateuch. It is to these first five fundamental books of the Bible that we now turn.

TORAH

The traditional view of Biblical authorship is that the prophet Moses, in the thirteenth pre-Christian century, wrote down the Torah on Mount Sinai at the dictation of God. The modern school of historical Biblical analysis and criticism holds to the view that the Pentateuch or Torah is a much edited compilation of earlier documents, documents written between the ninth and fifth pre-Christian centuries and arranged in their present form in the fifth century BCE.

Whether one accepts the traditional or the modern view, no one will dispute the fact that the Pentateuch contains the earliest literary records of the religion of Israel or that its Five Books are first in importance among the sacred texts of our religion. "The Five Books of Moses," whoever their author or authors, are the primary source of Israel's faith. To examine what the Pentateuch has to say about proselytes is, therefore, of utmost importance. To begin with Torah is truly to put first things first.

Many modern scholars believe that the stories of Creation, the Patriarchs and Joseph are legendary. They may be. But it is precisely in the realm of its folklore that a people reveals its elemental thought and feeling, its basic beliefs, its loftiest aspirations. The political history of Israel, as of other folk, was influenced by external circumstances—climate, geography, wars. Its myths and legends are the expression of its inward spiritual experience. Its folklore bespeaks a people's soul.

Literally, the first concern of the Hebrew Bible is not with Hebrews but with humanity. Scripture opens not with the birth of Abraham, traditional father of this folk, nor of Moses, historic founder of their faith, but significantly with the creation of the world and the advent of man.

In the religion of Israel so incomparably precious is man that whereas in Genesis God evokes every other component of His universe by mere command, saying, "Let there be" . . . light, land, sea, sky, sun, moon and stars; creatures of the waters, air and earth . . . "and so it was"—when He contemplates His masterpiece, He says not "Let there be man" but

"Let Us make man in Our image . . ." Then God molded man from the dust of the ground . . . breathing into his nostrils the breath of life . . . (Genesis 1:26 and 2:7)

In the Creation story so holy is mankind that the Eternal broke with His own divine precedent of verbal command only to create man. Even the Almighty had to labor in the sweat of His brow, as it were, to fashion man. He made only man in His image; and, to do this, He literally inspired him with His own breath or spirit. That is how "man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

Do we have here a scientific, historically accurate account of man's origin? Hardly. But surely this is a completely accurate version of what the religion of Israel teaches about the supreme importance to God of man both during and after man's creation.

Obviously God is not Israel's exclusive deity. He is concerned with the fate of all mankind, even men as distant as those of India and as dissolute as those of Sodom. The peoples of Chaldea, Phoenicia, Philistia, and Ethiopia; of Tyre, Sidon, Cyprus, Rhodes and the distant isles are all part of His divine plan.

Does the Torah favor or forbid the admission of these diverse folk into the religion of Israel? Did Israel in Bible times discourage, tolerate or seek proselytes? So much is certain: The Torah is source for the tradition that, from the inception of this folk and faith, the religion of Israel was born with and borne by converts. Julius Lewy, in his article "Origin and Signification of the Biblical Term 'Hebrew'" (*Hebrew Union College Annual*, 1957, pp. 1-13), has supplied some erudite evidence that etymologically the very word "Hebrew" is itself not a proper noun designating a specific people, but rather a widely used general Semitic term signifying a resident alien or ger.

ABRAHAM

The first Hebrew was himself a convert. With his wife Sarah, Abraham left their Aramean kin and their home in Chaldea to found a new and blessed nation.

Abraham took Sarah his wife . . . and all the souls which they had made in Haran and they started off for . . . Canaan. (Genesis 12:5)

Later rabbinic tradition has it that these "souls" were male and female converts which Abraham and Sarah respectively "made," i.e., brought to spiritual birth by initiation into the new Jewish faith. Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, began life as a heathen in Syria. So did Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob, as well as his concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah. On their maternal side each of the traditional founders of the twelve tribes of Israel was the son of a convert. In addition, two of them, Judah and Simeon, married women of Canaan.

Moreover, the tradition that Israel's founder was not born an Israelite was never permitted to die or be forgotten. To this very day it is prescribed that at least twice a year—once in spring at the Haggadah-reading on Passover and again in late summer during the Sabbath Torah-reading in the synagogue—every Jew will recall this tradition by reciting the words

My father was a wandering Aramean. (Deuteronomy 26:5)

Abraham was alert to the contaminating pagan influence of the ethnic stock from which he came. In commissioning his major domo, Eliezer of Damascus, to journey to Syria to fetch "from my father's house" a bride for Isaac, he warned his steward

Beware of taking my son back there . . . God took me away from my father's house . . . If the woman is unwilling to follow you, then you are free from this oath of mine. (Genesis 24:6 ff.)

That Abraham's fear was well founded is apparent from the account of Rachel's theft of her father's household gods when she fled from Syria with her husband Jacob (Genesis 31:19-35). Once they are removed from their idolatrous girlhood homes, these brides of the Patriarchs become exemplary matrons. From them issue sons who father the tribes of Israel.

Possibly, as modern critics aver, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not names of historic men, but eponyms, generic tribal titles. Hence their wives could not be actual women either. Yet this is factual: The Torah (and, therefore, Judaism) regarded these men and women as the flesh and blood ancestors of Israel, their marital alliances as valid, their progeny not only as legitimate but also as

the bearers of the religious heritage of Israel. The Torah teaches and wants its adherents to understand that non-Israelites can become members of Israel and beget Israelites. Not only the Patriarchs and their Aramean consorts could do this, but peoples of any race, nation or religious origin.

Moses' wife, Zipporah, by whom he had Gershom, was the daughter of a priest of Midian. David may not really have been the great grandson of Ruth, the girl-convert from Moab, but he certainly was the husband of Maacah, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, and mother of Absalom. The mother of Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor to the Judean throne, was Naamah the Ammonite.

CIRCUMCISION

That most converts to Judaism have been females may, in part at least, be ascribed to the traditional condition *sine qua non* for the full conversion of males: circumcision. This has been the physical sign of the covenant between God and the men of Israel since Abraham's day.

The Lord appeared unto Abraham and said . . . "Every male among you is to be circumcised. . . . That is the sign of the covenant between us. . . . Every male . . . is to be circumcised when he is eight days old, whether he be born in your household or acquired from any foreigner that is not of your race." (Genesis 17:1-12)

The covenant does not consist of the rite of circumcision. The covenant is that the Jew is to serve God and be holy as God is holy. Circumcision is but the external sign of this covenant. Analogously, the bow in the sky was merely the symbol of God's compact with Noah. As the rainbow antedated the Deluge, so circumcision was a common pre-Israelitish custom. But, whatever the incentive for the practice among other peoples, for Israel it signified consecration, the casting off of spiritual uncleanness as preparation for assumption of full membership in this covenanted people.

PASSOVER

Besides native males, including native born slaves, the ger who wished to participate in the Passover had to be circumcised.

When a ger who is with you desires to keep the Lord's Passover, let all male members of his family be circumcised; then he shall count as a native. (Exodus 12:48)

Historically, Passover is the most ancient of Hebrew festivals. Religiously, the Exodus was the most significant event in the annals of Israel—so important that it is the only historical event included in the Decalogue and there mentioned in the very first sentence. It was the sign of the fulfillment of the covenant on God's part. To participate in the Paschal celebration a man had to identify himself completely with Israel, the people of the covenant. Circumcision was the physical sign of this identification, the external fulfillment of the covenant on the part of each Israelite. It was a requirement for the full-fledged male ger, the complete convert. He must be circumcised to celebrate the Passover.

THE LAW

The universalism of the prophets runs through not only the legend and lore of the first book of the Pentateuch. It also animates the principles and policies outlined in the other four books. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy lay down the general rules

There shall be one and the same law for the native and for the ger. (Exodus 12:49; Leviticus 24:22; Numbers 9:14, 15:15, 16, 29; Deuteronomy 1:16)

As you are so shall the ger be before God. (Numbers 15:15)

The ger who dwells with you shall be to you as the homeborn and you shall love him as yourself. (Leviticus 19:34)

Specifically, the ger was to enjoy equal freedom from injustice and oppression. If indigent, he was entitled—with the poor, the orphan and the widow—to sustenance from the gleanings of grainfield, vineyard and olive orchard (Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19ff), and to maintenance from loans, tithes and other public funds (Lev. 25:6; Deut. 14:28ff; 26:12ff). The cities of refuge, in which the native Israelite could obtain emergency asylum, were open to the ger as well (Numb. 35:14ff; Joshua 20:9).

The same moral prohibitions—against unchastity (Lev. 18:26), idolatry (Lev. 20:2; Ezekiel 14:7ff), blasphemy, murder, maiming of man or beast (Lev. 24:16-22; Numb. 15:30)—applied to the ger as to the native Israelite. Along with the whole community he was invited to learn Torah (Deut. 31:12; Joshua 8:33ff) and to enter the covenant with God (Deut. 29:10ff).

The same ritual requirements were made of him. He incurred the same taboos (Numb. 19:10), could eat no blood (Lev. 17:10) or animal that died of natural causes or was torn by beasts (Lev. 17:15). He observed the same sacrificial procedures (Lev. 17:8; 22:18; Numb. 15:14, 26) and the Passover prohibition of leaven (Ex. 12:19). He partook of the Paschal meal (Ex. 12:48; II Chronicles 30:25), enjoyed Sabbath rest (Ex. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14), observed the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29), celebrated the feasts of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:14) and Pentecost (Deut. 16:11).

However, a female proselyte could not become the wife of a priest (Lev. 21:14). A foreigner, *nachri*, could not be appointed king (Deut. 17:15). Apparently, during that portion of the Biblical period when kings ruled in Israel, a ger might aspire to the throne. In the Talmudic period and later, when kingship and kingdom had ceased to exist, the ger was denied, theoretically, the right of kingly rulership.

No class-conscious discrimination existed in the minds of the authors of the Bible as to the kind of proselyte sought or acceptable. The "mixed multitude" (Exodus 12:38) of non-Israelites who fled Egypt during the Exodus were among the gerim included in the address delivered by Moses to his people at the end of their forty years' wilderness wandering

You stand all of you today before the Lord your God . . . the men of Israel together with . . . the ger who is in the midst of the camp . . . that you may enter into the covenant of the Lord your God, that He may confirm your position this day as His people and that He may be your God, as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Deuteronomy 29:9-12)

In the mind of the Deuteronomist, the ger was an integral part of the compact made between God and the Patriarchs, His own

first gerim. To the ger, as well as to the native Israelite, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are "your fathers."

In the sight of God, the ger was the same as any other Israelite.

For the Lord your God is never partial. He secures justice for the orphan and the widow and He loves the ger . . . (Deuteronomy 10:17ff)

Not only does God love the ger. He calls upon Israel to do likewise. For parents He demands honor

Honor your father and your mother . . . (Exodus 20:12)

and reverence

Everyone shall revere his mother and his father. (Leviticus 19:3);
for His prophets He requires proper respect and protection

Touch not My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm. (Psalm 105:15)

But

The ger who dwells with you shall be treated like a native; and you must love him as much as you love yourself. (Leviticus 19:34)

THE PROPHETS

The universalistic expressions of the post-Pentateuchal portions of Scripture are, if anything, even more ardent and eloquent in advancing the ideal of mission and espousing the cause of the convert than the writings attributed to Moses.

The author of the remarkable tenth chapter of Genesis believed all the peoples of the civilized world to be a single family. The prophet Isaiah foresaw a time when all men would be reunited through the influence of Judaism. They will converge on Zion, encouraging each other to make this pilgrimage to become God's disciples

In after days, it shall be that the Lord's hill shall rise towering over other heights; to which all nations shall stream and many folk exclaim, "Come, let us go up to the Lord's hill, to the house of Jacob's God, that He may instruct us in His ways and we may walk in His path; for revelation comes from Zion, and from Jerusalem God's word." (Isaiah 2:2ff)

The same hope, expressed in almost identical words, occurs in the book of Isaiah's younger contemporary, Micah (Micah 4:1ff).

Isaiah preached in a period of profound tension and anxiety. His homeland, Judea, was recurrently under threat from its powerful neighbors. Yet he looked beyond that era of impending disaster, imminent conquest and ultimate exile, to the day when allies and enemies alike would join Israel as proselytes

God will have pity upon Jacob and once more take Israel as His own, resettling them in their own country where gerim shall join them and attach themselves to the household of Jacob. (Isaiah 14:1)

The prophets generally did not separate their hope of returning Israel to God's will and way from their dream of converting the gentile. To them, both were aspects of one mission, parts of the same endeavor to turn the wayward—whatever their origin—toward God. So, when Isaiah pleads for the conversion of Israel, he submits that scarlet sins cannot become snowy white as pure innocence, but repentance and obedience have redemptive power not merely for the seed of Abraham but for any man, for all mankind.

Micah, uttering his sublime definition of ethical monotheism, invites not Israel alone but all humanity

It has been told you, O *man*, what is good and what God demands of you—only to do justice and cherish kindness and live in tranquil fellowship with your God. (Micah 6:8)

"The Phoenicians," says William Addis, in Peake's *A Commentary on the Bible*, "were familiar with the idea that a man might become the client of a god and so put himself under divine protection. They used the same word for 'client' as the Hebrews, viz., *ger*. Hence we have such names in Phoenician as Gerastart, 'client of Astarte,' Gerhekal, 'client of the temple,' etc. But to be the client of Israel's God, moral qualities are necessary." In order for one having no inherited rights in the community of Israel to enjoy the privileges of membership, to "sojourn in God's tent," he must lead a blameless life; do right; speak truth; honor other *yirey Adonai*, God-fearers, worshippers like himself; stand by his

oath without retracting, no matter what the consequence; refuse to take a bribe or interest on a loan. So it is written in the fifteenth Psalm. He who would "ascend God's hill" must have "clean hands and a pure heart" and "never break his word." So it is written in the third and fourth verses of the twenty-fourth Psalm.

Despite their close acquaintance with man's inhumanity to man, prophet and psalmist devoutly believed that their ethical faith was within the spiritual grasp of all mankind. When Scythian hordes were ravaging the whole Near East from Egypt to Babylon, a prophet whose words are included in the book of Zephaniah announced total conversion of the world as God's final judgment

I will grant the nations a purified speech so that all of them will call upon God's name and serve Him unanimously. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia to the farthest reaches of the north My worshippers shall come bringing Me their offerings. (Zephaniah 3:9-10)

The prophet Jeremiah's career coincided with a period first of great peril—the invasion of Palestine by Pharaoh Psammetichus II and the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar—and then of calamity—the extinction of the 400-year-old Davidic monarchy and the subsequent Babylonian exile. Yet Jeremiah looked forward to a time when Jerusalem would be the center of a religiously regenerated world

In those days they will call Jerusalem "the throne of God" and all nations shall gather to it living no longer by the superstitions of their benighted minds. (Jeremiah 3:17)

"If you will return to Me, O Israel," says God, and will conduct yourselves in "just, honest and right" fashion, your penitence will be followed by the conversion of all people, who will then use God's name in blessing (Jeremiah 4:1-2).

Not Israel alone, but also its hostile neighbors—nomadic marauders from Syria, Moab and Ammon—will suffer exile; but if in their captivity these people adopt the religion of Israel and Israel's God they will be returned to their respective countries.

As for My evil neighbors . . . after I have plucked them up, I will . . . restore . . . every man of them to his own property and his own land. Then if they are careful to learn the ways of My people and how to

swear by My name, saying "As God liveth" (just as they once taught My people to swear by Baal) they shall be built up among My people. (Jeremiah 12:14ff)

To the exiles in Babylon, Ezekiel preached that, no matter what had befallen them at the hands of foreigners, they were never to forget their religious obligation to the client of God, the ger who voluntarily sought admission into the religious community of Israel. Even in captivity, perhaps more especially there, they were to have compassion on him, remembering always that one and the same law held both for him and the native Israelites. Ezekiel rebuked his people for their ill-treatment of proselytes

I leave you to the scorn of nations and the mockery of the world. . . . Gerim are oppressed, widows and orphans abused. . . . You scorn what is sacred to Me. Natives . . . wrong the weak and wretched and inflict injustice upon gerim. (Ezekiel 22:4, 7-8, 29)

He reiterated the prohibition against idolatry. Half-hearted worship of God, whether by native Israelite or convert, is equally reprehensible

Anyone belonging to Israel or a foreign born proselyte who abandons Me, taking his idol to his heart, will I . . . excommunicate . . . from My people. (Ezekiel 14:7ff)

He admonished them on the subject of equitable property settlement when they return to Judea

This land you must divide among yourselves, the clans of Israel. You must allot it among yourselves and among the proselytes who bring up families among you. They are to count as natives and be allotted land of their own among the clans of Israel. You must assign the proselyte his land within the clan where he stays, says the Lord. (Ezekiel 47:21ff)

For more than two decades following Ezekiel's final prophecy in 570 BCE, nothing disturbed the empire bequeathed by Nebuchadnezzar to his successors. Then, in 543, Cyrus, ruler of one of the vassal states of the Babylonian Empire, revolted against his overlord and made himself king of Persia. In four years he took

over the whole territory and rule of the empire of Babylon. During these four years, perhaps the greatest of Israel's literary prophets began his ministry among his exiled fellow Jews. His sermons are found in Chapters 40 to 55 of the book of Isaiah. His name appears nowhere. He is known to modern Biblical scholars as the Second Isaiah.

This prophet envisioned the day when every knee would bend in homage to God and every tongue swear in His name, when He would be acknowledged sole, universal Lord of all mankind. God, he said, calls upon Israel to make His glory manifest to the gentiles

Here is the message of God the Lord . . . I, the Eternal, have called you . . . I formed you . . . to be a light unto the nations, to open eyes that are blind and to free captives from their bondage. (Isaiah 42:5ff)

Israel's task is to be a light in the darkness of religious ignorance, to give vision to eyes blinded by superstition, to free minds enslaved to idolatry.

Second Isaiah felt that the divine work of salvation, encompassing both Jews and gentiles, had already begun. He saw in Cyrus, though not a conscious convert, a worshiper of Israel's God who would spread His religion among all mankind. But far more than Cyrus, it is Israel, possessor of the true religion, which is to be the instrument for the conversion of the gentile. Unto Israel shall come men from all nations giving their adherence to God and marking on their hands the inscription "the Lord's" as a sign that they have become proselytes, naturalized Israelites.

Turn to Me and you are saved, all the ends of the earth! . . . Every knee must bend to Me and every tongue vow loyalty. (Isaiah 45:22-23)

The rules of My religion I send forth to enlighten every nation. (Isaiah 51:4)

It is too small a service for the God of all the world merely

to set the clans of Jacob up again. . . . I now appoint you to bring light unto the nations that My salvation may reach the world's end. (Isaiah 49:6)

After the return from exile the Jerusalem community will be restored, not only by the return of dispersed native Jews, but also,

according to an anonymous Third Isaiah, by the addition of new converts

Let not the descendant of a foreigner say "God will excommunicate me" . . . Foreigners who join the Lord, to worship Him and love Him, . . . will I bring to My holy hill, and make joyful in My house of prayer. . . . My temple shall be called a house of prayer for every nation. Here is what God says, Who gathers Israel's outcasts in: "I will gather yet others in besides those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:3-8)

The destiny of the gentiles in the glorious future is depicted by a younger contemporary of Second Isaiah. Many nations will join themselves to God and will become His people

. . . Citizens of great cities shall yet come, saying, "Let us go up at once to pay homage to God and to seek the Lord of hosts . . ." Many a people and mighty nation shall come to seek God in Jerusalem, to do obeisance to the Eternal. "In those days," the Lord of hosts declares, "ten men from nations of every language will seize the robe of a single Jew and say 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you!'" (Zechariah 8:21-23)

Of these prophetic passages, Fleming James has written, in his *Personalities of the Old Testament*, "The Gentiles must become converts to Judaism . . . but are not to be coerced; they will come of their own free will, come because they see the need of divine help, come with love and expectancy. And they will be welcomed, will be made God's people just as much as the Jews themselves. True, there will be an exaltation of the Jew, but a noble one. For the saying lays on him a responsibility; if they wish to go with him he must receive them, must teach them and make room for them. . . . He must share his God with all peoples."

THE PSALMS

The psalmists, whose "delight is in the Law of the Lord" and who lament when "there is no more any prophet," piously follow the letter of the Law and give exultant expression to the spirit and vision of the prophets in their hymned references to the proselyte. Like the priest and the prophet, the psalmists too believed that God is specially concerned for the welfare of proselytes and that

all the world will come to serve Him.

"How precious is Thy love, O Lord; the children of men take refuge under the shadow of Thy wing . . . Unto Thee shall all men come . . . Dwellers at the world's far end are awed at the proofs of Thy power . . . Sing homage, all the earth, to God . . . Bless us, O God, till men worship Thee at the world's farthest end . . . All nations Thou hast made shall come and bow before Thee . . . Thou, only Thou, art God . . . Let every nation know His wondrous deeds . . . Praise the Lord, O families of the nations . . . Confess that the Lord, He is God . . . Laud Him, all ye races . . ."

The testimony of the psalmist is not for Israel alone. What God has done for Israel, He can and will do for all the nations, since His sovereignty is worldwide. It is not enough for Israel to acknowledge the incomparable greatness of God. In fulfillment of prophecy, the psalmists invited all peoples of the world to join Israel in the worship of the one and only God. God's goodness to Israel is but a revelation to all mankind of His ways in dealing with those who "fear" Him. The psalmist felt that the nations, by whatever names they call their gods, were potentially "fearers" of the Lord.

"God-fearers," *yirey Adonai*, represent to the psalmist worshipers of God who are not of Jacob's seed. Such "fearers of the Lord" seem to be a fourth category of religious communicant in Israel, the other three, of course, being priest, Levite and native Israelite.

Bless the Lord, Israel's household;
Bless the Lord, Aaron's household;
Bless the Lord, Levi's household;
Bless the Lord, O fearers of the Lord. (Psalm 135:19-20)

Israel trusts in the Lord . . .
Aaron's household trust in the Lord . . .
Fearers of the Lord trust in the Lord . . .
The Lord remembers us and will bless Israel and Aaron's household;
He will bless the fearers of the Lord, the humble with the great.
(Psalm 115:9-13)

Fearers of the Lord, praise Him;
Glorify Him, ye seed of Jacob. (Psalm 22:24)

There are Psalms which seem to have been specially composed for, and perhaps by, such Lord-fearers or proselytes.

I sought the Lord and He answered me,
He rescued me from all my superstitious fears . . .
The angels of the Lord camp around His "fearers"
and save them.

Try the Lord; you will find Him good;
happy the man who takes shelter with Him.
"Fear" the Lord, ye saints of His.
His "fearers" never want for anything.
Apostates may be famishing and starving,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.
Come, listen to me, my children;
I will teach you the "fear of the Lord." . . .
None who take shelter with Him
shall be desolate.

(Psalm 34:5, 8-12, 23)

On Thee, O God, I set my heart . . .
Show me Thy ways, O Lord,
Teach me Thy paths . . .
Remember not the errors of my youth . . .
Any man who "fears" God
He will teach the right course to take.
His own life will continue prosperous
and his posterity will inherit his property.
The secret of God is for them that "fear" Him
and His compact is to instruct them . . .
Preserve and deliver me, disappoint me not
as I find refuge with Thee.
May my devotion and my loyalty preserve me,
for I hope in Thee.

(Psalm 25:1, 4, 12-14, 20-21)

EZRA-NEHEMIAH

On the theme of proselytism, apparently the only negative note in all of Scripture is that sounded by Ezra-Nehemiah, which, until modern times, was combined into one book in the Hebrew Bible. Upon seizing control of the Babylonian empire, Cyrus decreed that the Jewish exiles in Babylon might return home to Judea. His successor, Artaxerxes Longimanus, commissioned Nehemiah as civil governor and Ezra as spiritual mentor to reconstruct the national and religious life in the Jewish homeland. On their arrival in Judea, they found a general decline and decay in religious observance. They were particularly distressed that certain of their coreligionists had "married women of Ashdod, Ammon and

Moab," and that "their children . . . could not speak in the Jewish language (Nehemiah 13:23-24)." Nehemiah cursed the Jewish husbands

and made them swear by God that they would not marry their daughters to the sons of foreigners, nor marry their sons to their daughters, nor marry foreigners themselves. Was this not the sin of Solomon? . . . There was no king like him . . . beloved by his God . . . Yet even he was led to sin by his foreign wives. (Nehemiah 13:25-26)

"Divorce yourselves from the people of the land," Ezra commanded, "and from the foreign women" (Ezra 10:11). Upon receiving this order, "the crowd wept bitterly." And, while Shechaniah ben Jehiel agreed with Ezra, saying,

We have broken faith with our God by marrying foreign women. . . . Come, let us make a compact with our God to put away all these wives and their children. (Ezra 10:2-3)

Jonathan ben Asahel and Jaziah ben Tikva were opposed to this and they were supported by Meshullam and by Shabbethai the Levite. (Ezra 10:15)

It must be offered in extenuation of Ezra-Nehemiah's drastic measures that these were dictated by desperate circumstances; the survival of their people and its way of life were at stake.

Also worth noting are these items: Ezra-Nehemiah had nothing at all to say for or against converting these women and children to Judaism. The prophetic ideal of proselytism just does not seem to have entered their sharply focused minds. . . . The entire situation is unique. Nothing of the sort occurs elsewhere in the Bible nor, for that matter, in all subsequent Jewish history. The stand which Ezra-Nehemiah took against foreigners as such is contrary to that of their Biblical predecessors, and it did not go unchallenged by their literary successors.

Which brings us, albeit briefly, to the books of Job, Jonah, Esther and Ruth.

JOB

Job was a citizen of Uz. His philosophy, conduct and character are exemplarily Jewish, as his vindication by God, to say nothing

of the inclusion of this book in the Biblical canon, makes abundantly clear. Yet Job is not ethnically a Jew. Significantly, the Jewish author of this Hebrew masterpiece presents his great hero, a towering spiritual giant, as a non-Jew. What the author must have thought of Ezra-Nehemiah and their attitude toward their non-Jewish neighbors, can easily be guessed. It was just as well left unrecorded.

JONAH

In that prophetic gem, the book of Jonah, God rebukes the title-figure for his Ezra-like chauvinism and his reluctance to help save the sinful pagan city of Ninevah, capital city of Babylon, "wherein are more than 120,000 persons who know not right from wrong, and also much cattle." Per contra, the heathen sailors show themselves exceedingly reluctant to jettison a worshiper of Israel's God. They strain every sinew to row Jonah to a haven of safety. When they have exhausted every humane possibility, are finally compelled to cast him into the sea, and behold the resultant calm, then "they 'feared' the Lord exceedingly, sacrificed and made vows to Him."

Jonah had been unwilling to convey God's message to the Ninevites because, among other consequences from his point of view undesirable, their repentance would reflect unfavorably on his oft admonished but still unrepentant fellow Israelites. His worst fear was realized. The heathen Ninevites repent of their wickedness and, from the king on down to the last man in the kingdom,

call earnestly on God. Everyone must turn from his evil life. . . . Who knows if God will not relent . . . and save us! (Jonah 3:8-9)

They turn, God does relent and they are saved.

In direct contrast with Ezra-Nehemiah, this wonderful story would have men believe two things about the heathen: They are endowed by their Creator with potentially high moral and religious fervor; and they are ready to turn to Him if given the chance, if only invited to do so.

ESTHER

The bloodthirsty Persian king, Ahasuerus, having already executed his first wife, Vashti, is induced by his vizier, Haman, to order the massacre of all his Jewish subjects. His Jewish queen, Esther, points out that this will mean her own death. "If it please the king," she pleads, "let the decree be reversed." For gore-loving Ahasuerus, this will not suffice. First, Haman must hang. Then, instead of peaceably revoking the original order, the king commands the Jews to slay their attackers (Esther 8:10-14). To save their lives, "many pagans became Jews" (Esther 8:17).

Of course none of this ever happened. The story of Esther is fiction throughout. But what interests us here is the use, in Esther 8:17, of the Hebrew term *mit'yahadim*, "to become Jews," the only place in the Bible where this word occurs. Yet, in the author's time, it must have been a sufficiently well understood term and familiar enough phenomenon, for this writer is not anywhere given to recondite subtlety. What is more important, he approved of the conversion to Judaism of heathen enemies. He evidently enjoyed thoroughly the idea of men who had sought to take the lives of Jews being transformed into men who sought to live their lives as Jews.

RUTH

Some Biblical scholars believe that the book of Ruth was deliberately intended as a rebuttal to Ezra-Nehemiah, as a specific propaganda piece favoring conversion. There is general agreement that the story is neither biography nor history but fiction. Consider the names of its characters: Ruth—"the companion"; Naomi—"my sweet one"; Mahlon—"sickness"; Chilion—"wasting"; Boaz—"in him is strength"! Moreover, anachronisms abound in this idyll which prevent belief that it could have been written "in the days when the judges judged."

It is nonetheless a charming narrative about a beautiful and loyal heroine, the Moabite girl who married the boy from Judea whose family had migrated to Moab because, ironically enough,

there was a famine in Bethlehem, which means literally "the food house." Ruth's in-laws were apparently welcomed with kindness in the land of their traditional enemies, the Moabites, of whom it is written, in the book of Deuteronomy

. . . No Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord; none of his descendants even to the tenth generation shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord . . . (Deuteronomy 23:4)

Ruth herself became so deeply attached to the Jewish faith and the Jewish way of life that, after her husband died, she insisted on accompanying her widowed mother-in-law back to Bethlehem. In exquisite and memorable words that are a model of fealty and have since become a widely used formula in the Jewish conversion ceremony for women, Ruth made her declaration and her vow

Entreat me not to leave you. . . . Wherever you go will I go; wherever you stay will I stay; your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Wherever you die will I die and there will I be buried. May God destroy me and worse if aught but death part you and me. (Ruth 1:16-17)

Encouraged by Naomi's sage counsel and Boaz' affection and diligence, Ruth fulfills the ritual requirements for marriage to Boaz. In due course she bears him a son who becomes the father of Jesse who, in turn, begets King David, from whose line, according to later tradition, the Messiah will come.

Whatever else the author of this story may have had in mind, he surely cherished the hope that there would be Jews who would concur in his belief that an *eyshet chayil*, a woman of worth, even though of the specifically proscribed people of Moab, could nonetheless become a valiant Jew, a loving wife and mother in Israel, a progenitress of Judean kings. There were such Jews. Among them were those sages who considered this lovely little book worthy of inclusion in Holy Writ; and also those who ordained that the scroll of Ruth be read by all Jews everywhere at Pentecost when they recall the Giving of the Law at Sinai where, like Ruth pledging her fidelity to Judaism, "The people of Israel together with the ger" had covenanted with God, saying, "All that the Lord has

spoken, we will do and obey."

* * * *

What of the rest, the rank and file in ancient Israel, the plebeian populace? Did the ordinary citizen of Tekoah or Jerusalem, the man-on-the-street in Anathoth or Bethel, the average dweller at Ramah, Gilead or Galilee swallow whole the propaganda, intended or incidental, of the books of Ruth and Jonah? Did they really believe that Moabites and Ninevites were deservedly as cherished by God as were Israelites? Did they entirely agree with Amos that the Hebrew was in God's sight merely the equal of the Ethiopian, the Phoenician and the Syrian? With Isaiah, that Egypt was also His people and Assyria the work of His hands? With the psalmist that anyone with clean hands and a pure heart may ascend the hill of the Lord? How popular among the returning Jewish exiles was Ezekiel's scheme of counting proselytes as natives and assigning them land of their own in Judea? Or the priestly injunction that the ger must be to you as the native, and you are to love him as you love yourself? How enthusiastically did they take up their divinely appointed task of being "a light to the gentiles"? Or observe the ordinance that there be one and the same law for the native and the convert?

That there was, on the part of common men, some resistance even to the simplest of these requirements we may suspect from the curious circumstance that the elementary rule, "You must not injure or maltreat a ger" occurs no less than six times in the Law and very frequently in the Prophets. The commandment "There shall be one and the same law for homeborn and ger" also occurs six times. If these rules were generally observed in the performance rather than in the breach, what need for all this emphatic reiteration? Telltale also is the fact that, when the Torah commends the ger to the people's compassion, he is so often placed in the sad company of those traditional objects of pity and exemplifications of defenselessness, the poor, the widow and the orphan. What the plight of an ordinary, poor proselyte's widow or orphan must have

been is not pleasant to conjure with.

But, then, xenophobia, the dislike of the unlike, was hoary with age in Abraham's day and has not died in ours. If the ancients found it difficult to love the proselyte as they loved themselves, moderns do not find it easy to love even their homeborn neighbor that much either—the native Negro, for example, or the Puerto Rican fellow citizen. The prophets' fellow countrymen were not all prophets or psalmists or even priests. And it was not only the dream of mission and the obligations of religious hospitality set forth by their spiritual guides that the commoners resisted. There were certainly other features of prophetic preachment which also failed of complete fulfillment among the general populace.

It was never easy to squeeze a grand ideal into a small soul. Little men found it passing hard to share their divine legacy with others. Their minds were not yet big enough to encompass the breadth or the depth of their spiritual treasures. They simply did not realize how very much there was to share. They did not fully comprehend how limitless is God's love. Nor did they understand that human love is no commodity or store of energy that is consumed with use, but rather a plant that deepens and grows stronger and ever more beautiful as it expands and reaches outward and upward.

The teachers of the religion of Israel kept repeating, in an endless variety of ways: There is hope for the salvation of the homeborn and there is equal hope for the salvation of the outlander! Prophet, priest and psalmist possessed a patient, tireless pedagogic courage that made them remind Israel ever and again: You are all gerim before God. . . . He loves the alien. . . . Therefore, you, too, must love the ger. . . . Let him be unto you as the homeborn and love him as you love yourselves . . . for many nations will join themselves to the Eternal and become His people. . . . He Who gathers Israel's exiles in says, "I will yet gather to them those who were gathered against them."

Doubtless there were in Bible times Jewish leaders whose limited philosophy and pattern of existence would have pleased Ezra. But we like to think, and have some reason to believe, that many

in that far distant age were prouder of their prophets who taught that life is more nobly lived when it pleases God. After all, this is the people who produced these prophets and preserved their teachings. Despite their deficiencies, and with all their sins upon them, these ancient Jews must have sensed the universal human need for ideals which, like the sun's rays beaming on life's sea, freshens its waters as it draws them skyward.

The memoirs of Ezra-Nehemiah furnish one magnifying mirror to reflect the surface coarseness of some men in Biblical days. But a host of prophets, psalmists and priests provide an abundance of spiritual telescopes through which men may look out upon wider vistas, higher virtues, holier splendors.

CHAPTER TWO

CONVERSION DURING THE TALMUDIC PERIOD*

by

SIDNEY B. HOENIG

The Return from the Babylonian captivity in 536 BCE marks a turning point in Jewish history. The Biblical age was coming to a close. The experiences of the exiles in a strange land had broadened their outlook. The previously prevailing notion that God was only the Lord of Judea was now completely obsolete, a notion exemplified in I Samuel 26:19, where David says, "They have driven me out this day that I should not cleave unto the inheritance of the Lord, saying: Go, serve other gods." During the period of the Exile, the concept that God was omnipresent had gained absolute and final acceptance. As a corollary it was agreed that all persons, wherever they might be, could be received under His wings. Direct and continual contact with different alien peoples had resulted in a reinterpretation of the Judean's perspective on life as a whole. In particular, it had resulted in a new evaluation of Israel's place among the nations. The reference in Isaiah 56:3 to "those who joined themselves to the Lord" in the Exile clearly indicates that already in Babylon there were many who had been attracted to Judaism.

In the earlier Biblical period, individuals of other nations had also joined the Jewish people, but this had been primarily a volun-

**Note*—This brief and popular historic sketch is not aimed towards any halachic decision. Such belongs to the realm of the recognized, observant rabbinic authorities and *Poskim* following the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 268, 269). For details, see Encyclopedia Talmudit, Vol. 6, p. 254ff.—S.B.H.

tary affiliation with the *group*, with religious affiliation developing as a natural consequence. A distinction must be made, therefore, between *naturalization* and *proselytization*. There is a marked difference in status between one who becomes a citizen of a national state and another who accepts membership in a different religious faith. One could live in ancient Judea, as in modern Israel, as a non-Jew or one could adopt the religion of the state. The various usages of the Biblical term *ger*, meaning "a sojourning stranger" or "alien resident," make this clear. (See Genesis 19:9 and 23:4; also Aboda Zara 64b).

There were other usages of the term *ger* at different periods and in different places. For example, the term *ger tsedek*, used in talmudic literature, refers to a full proselyte, a "proselyte of righteousness." There are various other expressions in talmudic writings for different types of gerim [See Encyclopedia Talmudit on *ger toshab*, (Vol. 6, p. 290), *gerim gerurim* (Ab. Zara 31b), self-made proselytes, and *gerey arayot*, those who have converted out of fear of the lions (II Kings 17:24-41)]. The expressions "fearers of God" in Psalm 115:13 and "fearers of Heaven" in the Book of Acts 13:26 perhaps denote one who is about to accept Judaism. It seems that Paul had many Jews and religious proselytes in his audiences (Acts 13:43). It is clear that during the post-Exilic period many non-Jews affiliated themselves with the Jewish group in one manner or another.

During the time of the Second Commonwealth and after, the single word *ger* always meant "convert." In this era, proselytizing activities were carried on in many areas of the world, inside and outside of Judea, and one could become and remain a Jew without ever setting foot on the Holy Land. In short, proselytization as an established, vigorous, potent force developed in Judaism after there was universal recognition among its adherents that Judaism was to be regarded as a universal religion. During the Biblical period, the desire to draw all mankind into the religious orbit of Judaism was confined to the enlightened few. During the Talmudic period, such a desire became the common concern of many. Viewed in this light, one may understand the rabbinic remark, found in

Pesachim 87b, that the Jews were exiled from the Holy Land for the specific purpose of attracting converts.

Because of the particularistic notions held by the Jewish masses through most of the Biblical period, the separation of nation and religion was a concept which was beyond the grasp of the average Jew. Hence planned and organized activity for seeking new souls was not part of the ancient religious pattern. In fact, at the time of the establishment of the post-Exilic state, it was frowned upon severely. The prevention of marriages between non-Jews and Jews was an important element in the policies of Ezra and Nehemiah. They directed the Judeans to give up their heathen wives for fear that such mixed marriages would lead ultimately to the disintegration of both the newly organized Jewish state and the revitalized Jewish faith.

The Samaritans, too, were rejected for national and religious reasons. Samaritan sources record that, when Ezra banned intermarriage, many proselytes joined forces with the Samaritan governor, Sanballat. And, indeed, there may have been many Jewish voices raised against this prohibition. This may be deduced from such Biblical writings as the Book of Ruth. It is in this book that the phrase "to take refuge beneath the wings of the Lord" first appears with the meaning of "to be converted to Judaism." Tracing King David, the progenitor of the Messiah, back to the convert Ruth was indeed a strong invitation for the open acceptance of all true proselytes. The story of Esther in its historic framework, with its climax of many joining the faith, uses the Hebraic term *mityahadim*, "becoming Jews." In other communities of the Diaspora, too, there must have been many who attached themselves to Judaism, as evidenced in the Elephantine papyri of Jeb (Assuan) where non-Jewish names are found in the marriage contracts.

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Overt conversionist activities may be said to have had their beginning in the Hellenistic period. As a result of Alexander the Great's conquests, Jews moved to many cities and countries outside of Judea. Many served as soldiers in Egypt and remained in Alexandria.

Naturally, some married heathen women, and many of these women accepted their husbands' religion. The ritual for the conversion of a female was quite simple.

Judea often served as the battleground for the conflicts between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, conflicts which brought in their wake the taking of many Jews into Egyptian or Syrian captivity, and so contributed to the growth of the Jewish populations in foreign areas. Many of these captives, liberated through the payment of ransoms by their Egyptian or Syrian coreligionists, continued to dwell in the lands in which they had been held captive. A number of synagogues in Rome were established by Jews who were brought there as slaves and later emancipated. The opportunities for trade in the Mediterranean area likewise induced many to settle in the far-flung countries of that inland sea. In general, it was the ubiquitous nature of the Jewish people through the centuries and throughout the world which contributed directly to Jewish proselytization. The Alexandrian philosopher of the first century of the Common Era, Philo, speaks of a million Jews in Egypt, approximately one-eighth of the population of that country. Such a large number could not have been merely the result of natural propagation but must have been due, in part at least, to a process of proselytization. Flavius Josephus, the famous historian, writes, toward the end of the same century, the following concerning the spread of Jewish influence

There is not a city of the Grecians, nor any of the barbarians, nor any nation whatsoever, whither our custom of resting on the seventh day has not come, and by which our fasts and lighting up lamps and many of our prohibitions as to food are not observed; they also endeavor to imitate our mutual concord with one another, and the charitable distribution of our goods, and our diligence in our trades, and our fortitude in undergoing the distresses we are in, on account of our laws.

Here, as in other later sources, one perceives that the ceremonial laws—Sabbath and the dietary laws—may have been as powerful instruments of attraction as were Jewish monotheism and Jewish ethics.

Similar remarks are likewise found repeatedly in such apocryphal works as the Books of the Maccabees, the Sibylline oracles and even in the Gospels. Apparently, religious loyalty and superior conduct

marked off the Jew from the other individuals in the community. His moral caliber, his ethical concerns and even his strange observances held a strong allure for many who lived under pagan pressures and rebelled inwardly against the crassness and licentiousness which they were forced to witness and to endure. The purity of Jewish family life and the reaction against the prevailing mystery cults impelled many non-Jews in the Diaspora to adopt Judaism. The decline of the mystery cults, especially, resulted in the acceptance of Judaism by many former cult adherents. There is no doubt that, at the outset, this may have been merely ethical acceptance; the sources speak frequently of the "pious of the nations" and the "fearers of the Lord," meaning those who took unto themselves only the ethical approach of Judaism rather than the whole of Judaism. Only later did such individuals undertake the actual observance of the minutiae of Jewish religious law. This is summed up well by Philo, in his *De Vita Mosi*, II.5

Not only the Jews but all the other people who care for righteousness adopt them (i.e., the laws of the Jewish religion). . . . The Jewish Law attracts and links together all peoples, barbarians and Greeks, those who live on the mainland and those who live on the Islands. . . . And it has come to pass that Egypt and Cyrene, having the same government, and a great number of other nations imitate the Jewish way of living, and maintain great bodies of these Jews in a peculiar manner, and grow up to great prosperity with them, and make use of the same laws with that nation.

In time the universalistic teachings of Judaism became widely known in Alexandria through another vehicle, the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint. Contrasts could now be made between the teachings of the prophets and the writings of the classical Greek and Roman authors. Moreover, the spread of Hellenistic literature defining Judaism, picturing its glory and the inferiority of paganism, as well as the growth of the synagogues in the Diaspora, served as proselytizing agents. Contact with non-Jews in the Diaspora gave rise to a need for apologetics and a defense of Judaism. This led to a careful analysis of Jewish religious fundamentals and a defining of Jewish religious goals which, as a consequence, gave rise to a more determined effort to teach the

non-Jew those fundamentals and to make his conversion one of those goals. The Gentiles were filled with wonder at the Jewish perseverance in the face of every obstacle. This admiration often culminated in their seeking membership in the Jewish people.

Some non-Jewish writers of this period looked upon such conversions with disfavor. This is evident in the writings of many Greek and Roman authors who scoff at Judaism. Yet this very scoffing oftentimes contains definite proof of the widespread influence of Judaism upon the Hellenistic world. The Book of Tobit in the Apocrypha illustrates the manner in which the obligation to win the world to Judaism was on the mind and heart of the religious Jew of this period. Tobit writes a prayer of rejoicing in which he says

Extol God before the Gentiles, ye children of Israel, because for this purpose has He scattered us among them. (Tobit 13:3)

Many nations shall come [to Jerusalem] from afar at the name of the Lord God and with gifts in their hands, even gifts to the King of heaven; all generations shall praise Thee with great joy. (Tobit 13:11)

Similarly the Apocryphal Book of Judith relates that an Ammonite, Achior, was circumcised and converted after he witnessed the triumph of the Jews over their enemies. The military victories of the Hasmoneans and the expansion of Judea to a prominent place among the nations of the Near East gave considerable stimulus to the process of proselytization and brought large numbers of converts into Judaism. Propaganda for conversion may have become widespread as a result of the visits of the Hasmonean delegations to Rome.

The first and practically the only case in all Jewish history of the forced conversion of a conquered enemy nation occurred in the reign of the Hasmonean ruler, John Hyrcanus, 135-104 BCE. He defeated the Idumeans in battle and compelled them to accept Judaism. Some scholars have sought to interpret Psalm 118 as referring to this Maccabean triumph. The Hebrew word *amilam* occurs three times in rapid succession in verses 10, 11, and 12 of this psalm. It is usually translated as "I will cut them off." Those

who regard Psalm 118 as a Maccabean psalm believe that the correct translation of this word is "I will force them to be circumcised." This action of John Hyrcanus must be construed as a step in the process of Hasmonean national expansion. The Judean king was endeavoring to unite the natives of all his conquered lands with his own people into one strong nation. Later, the Hasmonean Alexander Jannai, 103-76 BCE, massacred the vanquished Moabites because of their refusal to submit to conversion (and hence to the advancement of Maccabean dreams of empire). These instances of successful and unsuccessful forcible conversion are condemned strongly in the Talmudic writings and are declared to be completely contrary to our religious teachings. After the coming of the Romans brought the Hasmonean dynasty to an end, the attempts to convert individuals and nations against their will ceased. Propaganda, teaching, exemplary influence and not force were the normal methods used to gain converts. That these efforts were far from unsuccessful may be gathered from a remark by Valerius Maximus, a contemporary of Tiberius, that in 139 BCE the praetor of Rome "forced the Jews to go back to their homes because they tried to corrupt Roman morals through their cult of Jupiter Sabazios." The last two words are probably a Latinizing of the Hebrew phrase for "Lord of Hosts."

Because of the strict rules of levitical purity practiced in Judea during the Second Temple era and their consequent effect upon relations to non-Jews, it is very probable that many Gentiles in the Holy Land perforce, to facilitate their life there, accepted Judaism. This conjecture, however, is not conclusive. Interestingly, according to a number of Talmudic sources, proof of conversion did not have to be produced by the convert in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, but, if someone in the Diaspora claimed that he was a convert, he had to bring proof. This may have been due to the sanctity ascribed to the Holy Land. Another authority, however, states the reverse, emphasizing that proof must be brought in *Eretz Yisrael* but not in the Diaspora, perhaps, in his opinion, because conversion was more commonplace in the Diaspora.

PROSELYTISM IN TANNAITIC LITERATURE

Stories current in that time demonstrate that it was sincerity and a desire to be part of the Jewish people rather than motives of convenience or compulsion which prompted most conversions. The statement of the sage Hillel, head of the Great Sanhedrin from 30 BCE to 10 CE, in *Pirke Avot* 1:12

Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving thy fellow creatures and drawing them near to the Torah

may have reference to conversionist efforts. The term "fellow creatures" rather than "Jews" as well as the phrase "drawing them near to the Torah" would seem to imply that non-Jews are meant. A number of stories about Hillel illustrate the deep desire of many contemporary non-Jews to become Jews (see *Shabbat* 31a).

It is said that a Gentile wanted to be converted only on condition that he would be permitted to learn and to observe merely the Written Law, i.e., the Torah, and not the Oral Law, i.e., the unwritten or common law. Hillel's colleague, Shammai, refused to have anything to do with a candidate for conversion who would accept only part of the Jewish religion. Hillel, however, welcomed the opportunity to bring another soul "under the wings of the Shechina." He began by teaching the convert the order of the Hebrew alphabet. On the next day, upon resuming the instruction, he reversed the order of the letters of the alphabet, much to the dismay of the convert; whereupon Hillel told him that even the order of the letters of the alphabet depend upon the Jewish Oral Law which was, at that time, being handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Hence, to accept and to understand the Jewish faith intelligently, one must study and conform to the Oral as well as to the Written Law. This episode is a reflection of the continuing struggle, in Hillel's time, between the strict and the more liberal constructionists over the question of the binding authority of the Oral Law, a struggle which was being waged between differing wings of the Pharisaic movement as well as between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees and Sadducees also had conflicting views on the subject of pros-

elytism. The aristocratic and priestly Sadducees looked askance upon new adherents to Judaism for these would disturb the Jew's "racial purity" and the Sadducaic ideal of national solidarity. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were more interested in weaning away individuals from idolatry and in bringing them "under the wings of the Divine Presence" and to a firm belief in ethical monotheism.

The different approaches to proselytism may best be seen in the concepts of the Pharisees and Sadducees as these concepts began to develop at the beginning of the Second Commonwealth. The Sadducees, because of their ethnic perspective, would not accept proselytes; the Pharisees, holding a universal view of Judaism, were ready to accept all into their universal religion, once certain basic requirements were met. Modern Judaism, having been transmitted through the Pharisees, holds the Pharisaic position on proselytism.

It is told that a heathen offered to convert to Judaism if his instructor could teach him all of Judaism while he was standing on one foot. Shammai rebuked the fellow for his insolence. Hillel, the patient one, accepted the challenge, saying to the heathen, while he stood on one foot

What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go, now, and study the commentary.

Apparently, in accepting converts, the primary and easiest approach was to put the stress on ethical values. After conversion, knowledge of the ritual and legalistic observances would follow naturally.

A third tale concerning converts and the great teachers, Hillel and Shammai, portrays a convert seeking admittance into Judaism only on condition that he be given assurance that he would become High Priest. No doubt some conversions were rooted in this kind of inflated ambition. Shammai could not and would not countenance such a self-centered approach. Patient Hillel, however, accepted this convert and then proved to him that even King David was ineligible for the priestly office, which is the hereditary prerogative of the de-

scendants of Aaron. Hillel's explanation was so convincing that it evoked from the convert the commendation, "O gentle Hillel, blessings be upon your head, for your forbearance has brought me under the wings of the Divine Presence."

A later rabbinic view, found in Tanchuma Vayakhel, regards a Gentile who studies Torah as being of as much importance as a High Priest. The patient approach of Hillel and the contrary severity of Shammai and the contrasting views of authorities in different centuries demonstrate that, then even as now, all Jews were not of one opinion regarding the worthwhileness of seeking and accepting proselytes. At times these attitudes undoubtedly have been and are colored and influenced by contemporary factors and circumstances.

Many other facts may be gleaned, not only from Talmudic sources but also from the pages of apocryphal and non-rabbinic literature, to show the widespread effects and effectiveness of Jewish proselytization in the first century CE. Strabo, the Greek writer, mentions many Judaizers, and Josephus records that numerous women in Antioch and Damascus were attracted to Judaism. He relates that the male inhabitants of Damascus once sought to kill the Jews but were afraid to go through with their plan because so many of their own wives had been attracted to Judaism that there was too great a possibility that their intention would be betrayed. Josephus also makes mention (*Antiquities* XVIII:3:5) of a woman, Fulvia, who embraced Judaism but was betrayed. Other noble converts were the Roman, Flavius Clemens, and his wife, Domitilla. Flavius Clemens was in the line of imperial succession. Because of their conversion to Judaism, Flavius was executed by the Emperor Domitian, and his wife was banished from Rome. Some scholars identify Flavius as the pious Roman Senator who, in a period of anti-Jewish feeling, committed suicide in order to avert an evil decree against the Jews. There are records indicating that the empress Poppea, wife of Nero Caesar, was often a worshiper in the Roman synagogues and friendly to the Jews, although her actual conversion to Judaism is in doubt. Dio Cassius, Roman writer of the third century, asserts that, in the reign of Tiberius,

14-37 CE, many Jews were punished because of their conversionist activity

When Jews had flocked to Rome in great numbers and were converting many of the natives to their ways, he [Tiberius] punished most of them.

Philo's profuse writings well illustrate that there was a deliberate attempt to attract the Hellenistic intelligentsia to Judaism. His literary remnants have the ring of propagandizing literature rather than apologetic tomes.

It is not difficult to comprehend that, in this period of widespread conversion, there may have been many who, for various reasons, could not remain loyal to their adopted faith. The relapse of some converts to paganism naturally conditioned the views of the rabbis of that era as well as in later generations and their reactions to programs of overt proselytization. Josephus notes

Of the many Greeks who have come to accept our laws, some have remained loyal, while others, not having the persistence to stay, have again apostatized.

Thus the harsh statement of a somewhat later time, found in Sanhedrin 106a, "Trust not a proselyte even to the twenty-fourth generation," may be understood. The rabbis, fearful that some converts would renounce Judaism after converting in order to marry a Jewish person, made rigid rules to guard against such a possibility. In general, however, Tannaitic literature displayed a very positive and favorable approach in the matter of the making of converts. It is in the time of the Amoraim, as will be discussed, that hostility to proselytization became more pronounced. (The Tannaitic period of Talmudic development lasted from the death of Hillel, about 10 CE, until the completion of the Mishna, about 200 CE. The Amoraic period runs from 200 CE until the completion of the Gemara, about 500 CE. The Mishna and the Gemara together form the Talmud.)

HISTORIC CONVERSIONS DURING THIS PERIOD

An examination of some historic instances in the era of the Second Commonwealth reveals that conversion was related at times to the problem of marriage. Thus Herod Agrippa's sister did not wish to marry an Arabian noble because he refused to accept circumcision (Ant. XVI:7:6). Later, Agrippa the Second's sister, Berenice, married the King of Cilicia only after he was converted (Ant. XX:7). Nevertheless, there is an abundance of proof to show that conviction and sincerity prompted the act of conversion more often than marriage. In Temple days, when the city of Jerusalem was thronged with visitors for the Passover, many conversions took place. Indeed the relationship of the Passover to the circumcision rite and to conversion may be more important than is generally realized. Since the Bible expressly states that the uncircumcised shall not participate in the paschal sacrifice, there may have been an influx of converts into Judaism each year just before Passover because of the desire of the mentally emancipated non-Jew to participate in this joyous festival dedicated to universal physical and mental emancipation and spiritual elevation. The Talmud relates that the non-Jewish, probably Roman, soldiers who guarded the Temple were so impressed with the ceremonies and festivals which the Jews carried on there that, very often, they sought and gained admittance into the Jewish fold.

In many passages of Roman classical literature, one finds a keen hatred of the Jews and great resentment expressed over their proselytizing efforts. Thus Seneca declares, "The customs of this most accursed race have prevailed to such an extent that they are everywhere received. The conquered have imposed their laws on the conquerors." Tacitus asserts similarly, "Jewish proselytes are taught to despise the gods, repudiate nationality and to disparage parents." Horace, too, satirizes the proselytizing zeal of the Jews. Highly critical statements are found in the *Satires* of Juvenal. One may well ask, "If the Graeco-Roman world had such ill feeling toward the Jew and Judaism, why were Jewish proselyters so successful?" The answer is that the God-concept of the Jew made

much better sense than the multi-god-concept of the pagan. The Jew taught that the Supreme Being is not a collection of capricious deities in animal and human form but He is One Spirit Who pervades all the universe. Judaism succeeded by helping contrite individuals to shake off the effects of evil living and by showing them the way to a moral and ethical way of life. Little wonder, then, that the greater the number attracted to Judaism, the greater the outcry and the scorn of the Greek and Roman writers.

The acceptance of converts, following the mode of Jewish law, required a definite procedure. Such action was especially important in that there was a constant stress on the purity of the family. In fact, genealogical tables and records of the priestly families were kept for the purpose of emphasizing the importance of *yichus*, family pedigree. No doubt this accent on the family affected at times the Jewish attitude toward proselytes. According to Tosefta Shabbat 15, the House of Hillel held that a convert who had already been circumcised did not need another ritual. Circumcision was a *sine qua non*. We have seen that even the Herodian family demanded circumcision of Gentiles who wanted to marry Herodian women. It is believed by some scholars that ritual immersion was instituted later. In Temple days, the male convert faced, as a minimum, the requirements of circumcision (the symbol of the covenant of God with Israel, Genesis 17:10) and the bringing of a sacrifice. The latter was required probably as a means of encouraging the proselyte to participate in the Temple worship, since it required a personal appearance at the Temple in Jerusalem in a state of ritual purity. This was often a difficult requirement for those who lived in the Diaspora. After the destruction of the Temple, the convert was no longer required to go to Jerusalem. He simply set aside a sum of money to be used in the rebuilding of the Temple when the Jews would once again regain control of the Holy City. Later, when it became rather apparent that this longed for historical event might be many centuries in coming, the money requirement was abandoned completely. There seems to have been extant a manual called the *Didache*, a Greek word meaning "teaching," outlining the procedure of conversion. This

manual appears to have been adopted later by the Church Fathers for use in instructing converts to Christianity, an historical surmise which Church historians have either overlooked or ignored.

The most famous case of conversion in the Talmudic period was that of the royal family of Adiabene, a small but important country on the banks of the Tigris river bordering the Roman and Parthian empires. There is a full account of this event in *Antiquities*, Book XX, Chapter 2. Izates, the favorite child of the ruling monarchs, King Monobaz and Queen Helen, was sent to the court of a neighboring king to protect him against the jealousy of his elder brothers. The young prince married the daughter of his host. His wife was converted to Judaism by a travelling Jewish merchant who visited the court to sell his wares. The princess took the Hebrew name Samach. In 18 CE, she succeeded in converting her husband. When Queen Helen learned of this, she, too, began to study Judaism and was converted. King Monobaz, on his deathbed, passed over all his older sons and named Izates as his successor.

Although Izates considered himself a Jew, he was not circumcised. He was dissuaded from this operation by his mother and by his physician, Anania, a Hellenic Jew, who told him that circumcision was not required. Later, the court was visited by Eleazar, a Jewish scholar from Judea, who told the king that, since he was uncircumcised, he was not yet a Jew. Upon being so informed, Izates had himself circumcised. When this became public knowledge, a revolt broke out in the court. Izates was accused by a group of nobles of being unfaithful to the heathen religion of his forefathers. He crushed the revolt and thereafter ruled peaceably over Adiabene for nearly thirty years. He sent five of his sons to Jerusalem to study Hebrew.

In 43, Izates and Queen Mother Helen made a pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The queen mother presented to the Temple a door made of pure beaten gold to be used at the entrance to the innermost sanctuary. In 48, when Judea was suffering from famine, Queen Helen again came to the land, bringing with her shiploads of wheat and figs purchased in Cyprus and Alexandria, Egypt, to aid the starving people of the Holy Land.

Izates died, at the age of 55, in 55 CE. He was succeeded by his elder brother, Monobaz the Second, also a convert to Judaism. Queen Helen outlived her youngest son. When she died, Monobaz the Second had the bodies of Helen and Izates brought to Judea and buried in a magnificent mausoleum north of Jerusalem. This burial place had been constructed for this purpose during the lifetime of Queen Helen and under her direction. Monobaz the Second was so full of love for Judea that he built himself a palace in Jerusalem which he visited as often as he could. He contributed to the Temple the golden vessels used by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. When the Roman war broke out in 66, royal sons of Izates and Monobaz came with their soldiers from Adiabene and fought alongside the Jews. This kingly family remained loyally Jewish and on the throne of the kingdom of Adiabene until the year 115, when it was overcome and destroyed by the Roman legions under Trajan. Thus ended a hundred years of devoted royal allegiance to the highest traditions of our faith, a page of history which came to be written because an itinerant Jewish peddler, while selling his goods to the daughter of a heathen king, discussed with her the teachings of his religion.

THE STATUS OF THE PROSELYTE

It seems that during the Second Commonwealth the proselytes were thought of as coreligionists but not as being of the same race or nation as born Jews. They were considered to be a part of the Jewish religious fellowship, the peoplehood of Judaism, rather than as belonging to the Jewish race or Jewish nation. The Greek term for such religious affinity, used by Josephus (*Wars of the Jews* I:2), is *homophulon*.

In surveying the Talmudic literature, one is struck by the concern over the status of the proselyte. There are four gradations of Jews—priest, Levite, Israelite and convert. One may ask: Was a differentiation made between born Jews and converts in the general system of religious law or was this distinction imposed only in situations connected with marriage? (In this connection, see Yerushalmi Kiddushin 56c.)

The attitude toward the convert in the earlier Talmudic period may be judged by the account of what happened to Akabiah ben Mehalalel, a contemporary of Hillel. He is reported to have been excommunicated because he taunted the leaders of the Sanhedrin, Shemaya and Abtalion, for being the descendants of converts (Gittin 57b). The passage is evidence of a desire to develop a favorable attitude toward the proselyte. In fact, a proselyte, though not of the Jewish race, was called an Israelite. Thus the Tosefta to Nedarim 2:4 rules that, if one has vowed not to benefit from an Israelite, he is also forbidden to derive benefit from proselytes.

Moreover, according to Rabbi Jose in Yerushalmi Kiddushin 66a, a priest may marry the daughter of a proselyte for she is considered to be a good Jewess, religiously and racially. Josephus points out that a priest must marry one who is both of his religion and his race (and therefore a priest may not marry a proselyte). But the Talmud makes clear that, although a priest may not marry a convert, he may marry the daughter of a convert. The lineage of the child of the convert is considered to be completely Jewish. Rabbi Simon ruled that a priest could marry a convert only if she had been converted before she was three years old. Priests could marry only virgins. The virginity of a Jewish girl was closely guarded but there could be no certainty about those who came into Judaism from the immoral pagan world.

A specific example of the favorable attitude toward the offspring of converts may be seen in the case of Agrippa, king of Judea, 41-44 CE. He is called a "brother," a full Jew, though not of pure stock, since he was from the family of Herod the Idumean. When the subject of racial purity is discussed in the Talmud later on, the rabbis conclude that there is no such entity as a pure race. *Ala Sancheriv u'vilbel et kol ha-umot*, the Mishna states (Yadaim 4:4). "After the time of Sennacherib, pure races ceased to exist." Edomites, Moabites and all other non-Jewish peoples were eligible to become Jews because, through the admixture of races caused by Nebuchadnezzar's conquests, all the races were intermingled. Therefore, the Biblical prohibitions against marrying members of specific nations were no longer considered to be in effect after the

time of Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib, provided, of course, that the individuals in question were sincere converts to Judaism.

After the destruction of the Second Commonwealth, anyone who accepted Judaism automatically became a member of the dispersed Jewish people. There was no longer a Jewish state and so factors of nation and of race were not emphasized as before. Circumcision became firmly fixed in the Jewish religion as the chief symbol of the covenant between God and His people Israel. A male convert who was already circumcised did not need any further ritualistic processing, in the opinion of the School of Hillel. The School of Shammai required that a drop of blood be extracted from the convert as a symbol that the ritual of circumcision had been observed correctly. The latter opinion prevailed. As a consequence, sometime after the Destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, it was held that the circumcision ritual is the *sine qua non* of male conversion. The absolute requirement of ritual immersion for both male and female converts was instituted later.

The question arises, in the light of the many conversions in this period: Was Judaism, during this time, a "missionary" religion? It definitely was not. At no time were professional or specially selected persons trained or employed as missionaries. Converts were won through the religious propaganda spread by deeply consecrated and well learned rabbis and Jewish laymen and by the powerful example of the good lives which these dedicated people lived. It would be correct, however, to say that the Judaism of the Talmudic period was the religion of a people with a mission.

After 70 CE, there were no more mass conversions, forced or otherwise, in which the converts merged, within a few generations, with the rest of the Jewish people. The nations which accepted Judaism in the post-Temple era, such as the Khazars and the tribes of Southern Arabia, became "coreligionists." They did not immediately merge with or even identify themselves with the Jewish people. But as normative Judaism, as we now know it, began to crystallize, there was continual acceptance of *individuals* into membership in both the religion and the people. Those who entered the fold were, in a short span of time, completely and

inextricably mixed into the warp and woof of Jewish life.

AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

The War with Rome, 66-70, which ended in such tragedy for the Jewish people, brought in its wake an antagonistic spirit toward the non-Jew. This is reflected in the Eighteen Decrees recorded in the Talmud which prohibited marriage with non-Jewish women and widened the breach between Judaism and the Gentile world. Yet it was during the reign of Domitian, at the end of the first century CE, that conversions to Judaism began to increase greatly. Perhaps the Jewish challenge to the power of Rome had caused the more sensitive of the Roman aristocrats to realize the shallowness of the imperial goals and the spiritual crudity of emperor-worship, for many of these aristocrats accepted the Jewish faith. Instances are also recorded of Roman soldiers, during the war itself, going over to the Jewish side and becoming Jews religiously. The moral courage shown by the Jews in the years between the two wars with the Romans, i.e., between 70 and 132 CE, also probably helped to stimulate the desire of many non-Jews to identify themselves with a people made of such stern spiritual stuff. The official Roman reaction to all this may be surmised from the fact that, when Domitian put to death his own relative, Senator Flavius Clemens, who, as previously mentioned, had converted to Judaism, the charges on which he was convicted were *atheism* and *treason*!

One of the most famous converts to Judaism was Aquila, a member of the Roman royal family, who became a Jew early in the second century CE. Because Aquila translated the Bible from Hebrew into Greek, he is confused sometimes with Onkelos, who translated the Torah into Aramaic in the first century CE. There is a tradition (Megilla 3a) that Onkelos, too, was a proselyte. The work of Aquila is lauded highly by the sages. The manner of his conversion is described as follows

Having become well versed in the Torah, Aquila went to Rabbi Eliezer. Pointing to the verse, Deuteronomy 10:18 "And (God) loves the *ger* and gives him food and raiment," he asked if that was all he

could expect if he became a convert. Rabbi Eliezer's brusque reply was: "Is it little to have food and raiment? Is that not all that the patriarch Jacob prayed for in Genesis 28:20?" Greatly disappointed, Aquila went to Rabbi Joshua and addressed him in like manner. Rabbi Joshua, unlike Rabbi Eliezer, explained, "By bread is meant the Torah, the bread of life. . . . Raiment refers to the *tallit*, the prayer shawl, of good deeds. . . . Also, since the daughters of *gerim* may marry into the priesthood, their children will be privileged to offer sacrifices upon God's altar, set up the shewbread, and array themselves in the robe of the High Priest." The gentleness of Rabbi Joshua had the same effect on Aquila as that of Hillel before him had had on other converts. Aquila embraced Judaism and underwent circumcision.

After the unsuccessful Bar Kochba revolt, 132-135, the Roman emperor, Hadrian, suppressed the Jewish religion. Circumcision especially was interdicted under a law which prohibited bodily mutilation. Despite these adverse decrees, the sages continued to encourage conversion and to receive converts.

In this trying period of Hadrianic persecution, even Rabbi Simon ben Yochai, who, it is said, was betrayed to the Roman authorities by the son of a proselyte and was nearly handed over to the oppressor because of his antagonism to Rome and his persistence in studying Torah, asserted that the convert is dearer to God than the born Jew. Often, during this time of bloody torment, the most hardened of non-Jews would become impressed by the spirit of martyrdom and fortitude displayed by the suffering Jews. This is the manner in which the Talmud describes the execution of Rabbi Chananiah ben Teradyon

When the sage and martyr was wrapped in a scroll of the Torah and placed on the pyre with wet wool on his chest to prolong his agony, the executioner said to him: "Rabbi, if I remove these woollen lumps from your chest so that you will die sooner, will you vouchsafe to me a portion in the world to come?" "Yes," answered the rabbi. "Will you swear to me?" He swore to him. As soon as he swore, the executioner removed the wet lumps, increased the fire and threw himself into the flames. Whereupon a *bat kol*, a mystical heavenly voice, was heard, saying, "Rabbi Chananiah ben Teradyon and the executioner (who, by his act of faith, had shown himself to be a believer in the God of Judaism) shall share in the life of the world to come."

With the rise of Christianity, when true proselytes to Judaism

became more difficult to recognize, the rabbis, to be sure that the convert understood and accepted the original and the genuine faith, insisted on greater observance of the Law rather than mere acceptance of theology and ethics. Their stated view was that "a convert who has accepted all the words of the Torah except one is not to be received." Rabbi Jose ben Judah applied this even to scribal laws, i.e., those not derived from the Bible. Thus the long battle between Judaism and Christianity was joined. Ethics through Messianism was the way of life taught by Christianity. Leading an ethical life through observance of the Law of the One God was the *modus vivendi* of Judaism. The rabbinic strictness was, therefore, not an undue emphasis on legalism. It was a protective mechanism, the means used to recognize the genuine adherent to Judaism. In this light the prayer of the first century found in our prayer book in the *Shemone Esrey*, the Eighteen Benedictions, takes on greater meaning

Towards the righteous and the pious, towards the elders of Thy people, the house of Israel, towards the remnant of their Scribes, towards the proselytes of righteousness, and towards us also, may Thy tender mercies be made manifest, O Lord our God; and grant a good reward unto all who faithfully trust in Thy name.

Because of the troubles created by the failure of the Bar Kochba uprising, a more rigorous method of interrogating prospective converts was instituted. The baraita in Yebamot 47b, outlining the full procedure to be followed in accepting a convert and also describing the cautions involved, can be understood only against its historical background. Many Roman spies were disguising themselves as converts to help uncover plots to regain Jewish independence. This is reflected in an increasingly suspicious attitude on the part of the Jews toward those who seek to convert. The Hadrianic persecutions served not only to curb proselytization at that time but also to bring to the fore a new attitude, one of suspicion and sometimes almost of antipathy, toward the convert. Nevertheless, the historically continuous process of conversion did not cease and instances of attempts at active proselytization were not uncommon.

Tannaitic sources detail the procedure to be followed in accepting a convert. The convert is to be discouraged at first and the difficulties of putting on the yoke of Judaism are to be pointed out to him. The *mitsvot*, the commandments of the Law, are to be explained to him but not in too technical a manner. Burdensome and lengthy instruction should not be imposed; the convert is taught both the punishments and rewards of the *mitsvot*. In the case of a female proselyte there is to be a minimum waiting period of three months between conversion and marriage in order that there be no doubt regarding the Jewishness of her offspring. For both sexes, the ritual bath and a formal acceptance of the commandments became obligatory. The purpose of the ritual bath was to cleanse the initiate of his former idolatry so that he might come into Judaism as "a newly born child." A Talmudic passage emphasizes that, after immersion, the convert is an Israelite in every respect.

In the Talmudic as well as in all other periods of Jewish history, the ultimate decision to grant the candidate permission to convert rested not so much on legal technicalities as on the eagerness and sincerity of the candidate. On the same page of Yebamot which was cited above, the following statement is found:

Why must one not force too much knowledge on the candidate too hastily or be too meticulous in one's examination of him? Rabbi Eleazar said, "This is because of the embarrassing experience which Naomi had when she attempted to examine Ruth's reasons for wanting to affiliate herself with the Jewish people. It says, in Ruth 1:18, "She [Naomi] saw that she [Ruth] was steadfastly minded to go with her and she left off dissuading her." How did this come about? When Naomi said to her, "We are not permitted to travel far on the Sabbath," Ruth replied, "Wherever you go will I go." When Naomi said, "A woman is forbidden to be alone with any man except her husband," Ruth replied, "Wherever you stay will I stay," i.e., you will always be in the room with me. Naomi said, "Every Jew must observe the *Taryag mitsvot*, the 613 commandments of the Torah." Ruth replied, "Your people shall be my people," i.e., I shall do whatever is expected of a good Jew. Naomi said, "We are forbidden to worship idols." Ruth replied, "Your God shall be my God." Naomi said, "There are four ways in which a Jewish court may put a criminal to death." Ruth replied, "In whatever manner you die will I die." Naomi said, "In our cemeteries, criminals and non-criminals are buried in different sec-

tions." Ruth replied, "Wherever the good Jews are buried, there will I be buried." At this point Naomi gave up. "When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off dissuading her."

Another interesting incident narrated in the Talmud indicates that a recognition of the superior ethical insights of Judaism sometimes prompted non-Jews to turn to the Jewish faith

Rabbi Jochanan was being treated for toothache by a non-Jewish female dentist. Fearing that he might get a toothache on the Sabbath and being unwilling to visit the dentist on the Sabbath, he requested the lady to give him the formula for the medicine she used so that, if a toothache came upon him on the Sabbath, he could concoct the medicine at home. She agreed to let the rabbi have the formula on condition that he would reveal it to no one else. Rabbi Jochanan did not keep his promise because, as he later explained to the dentist, the withholding of information which is of benefit to all mankind is worse than the violation of a promise. On hearing this, she exclaimed, "A religion which teaches such concern for the public welfare is worthy to adopt as one's own," and she became a convert to Judaism.

It has been noted previously that a convert's legal status is that of "a newly born child." As a result, he has, legally speaking, no parents or relatives. Moreover, all former sins are wiped out and a distinctly new religious life begins. The elasticity of action which this interpretation permitted may be recognized through a situation described in Aboda Zara 15b. A non-Jewish woman admitted to Rabbi Eliezer that she had had sexual relations with a Jewish man. She wanted Rabbi Eliezer to convert her to Judaism. Rabbi Eliezer refused. She then went to Rabbi Joshua and made the same request. Rabbi Joshua consented to convert her, stating that, since she had made up her mind to convert, she was no longer her former sinful self. She was in the category of "a newly born child." She might, if she so desired, after conversion, freely marry the Jew with whom she had had illicit relations.

Some interesting problems arise in connection with acceptance of the Jewish faith. Could proselytes use the term "God of *our* fathers"? The decision of the rabbis was an affirmative one, for the convert has become a member of the family of Abraham, the first convert, the father of all Israel. Similarly, questions often arose with reference to a convert's marriage, financial status, polit-

ical rights and property inheritance. The intent of the Rabbinic courts, in deciding these matters, was to adjudicate them in a way that would not be hurtful or detrimental to the convert. Actual proof of conversion was not always demanded. A story is told of Rabbi Judah bar Illai that a person came to him and said that he was a self-convert and he was accepted. This shows how lenient the sages often were in their dealings with converts.

The rabbis were very insistent that the process of receiving converts should be conducted on the highest possible ethical level. There were specific prohibitions against abrogating any provision of the Law in order to ease the process of conversion or to make conversion more attractive, against allowing the convert to continue to adhere to any pagan practices, against using bribery or trickery to induce a person to convert. The rabbis were completely opposed to the use of any sort of force, compulsion or subterfuge in any matter involving conversion or, indeed, any other matter.

On the other hand, they were determined not to penalize an individual because of his conversion. Such a person was permitted to collect any inheritance left him by his former relatives and associates, even though, at conversion, he had renounced his forebears. However, according to Talmudic law, only those children born to him *after* his conversion were *his* legal heirs. The rabbis sought to protect the proselyte against exploitation. Many Talmudic passages reflect this rabbinic desire. What the actual social position of the proselyte was in the Jewish community of this period is difficult to ascertain with certainty. It is quite clear that, so far as the rabbinical authorities were concerned, it was their wish that the proselyte be integrated into the Jewish group promptly and completely.

There was a definite caste system in Jewish society during both the Biblical and Talmudic periods which contained elements that were sometimes detrimental to the convert. Kiddushin 76b and Yebamot 101b indicate that there were certain communities in which converts were excluded from holding public office. There are differences of opinion as to whether gerim are eligible to serve as judges in either civil or criminal cases. The manner in which

the caste system sometimes operated is indicated in Horayot 13a, which deals with the order of selection when Jewish captives are to be redeemed from Gentile captivity. The order of redemption is to be as follows: Priest, Levite, legitimately born Jew, illegitimately born Jew, Natin (a descendant of the Gibeonites—see Joshua 9:3-27), ger, redeemed female slave of Jewish birth. Obviously the ger did not stand in the top ranks of the Jewish society of that period.

The examples just cited pertain to freemen who converted to Judaism. Very often slaves in Jewish households became proselytes of their own free will. And sometimes attempts were made by Jewish masters to compel their slaves to convert so that the entire household might be able to observe completely all the religious customs and holy days of Judaism. Oftimes adult male slaves understandably resisted efforts to force them to be circumcised. Circumcision for an adult male, in those times, was a painful and sometimes dangerous operation. The Palestinian Talmud tells of a case in which a Jew bought some uncircumcised slaves, who refused his demand that they allow themselves to be circumcised. They were given twelve months in which to comply with his order. At the end of the twelve months, those who had persisted in their refusal were sold to Gentiles. As a general rule, even the unconverted Jewish slaves were permitted to observe the Sabbath. If a slave submitted to circumcision, he was permitted to eat of the paschal lamb. If he was the slave of a priest, he could eat of the heave-offerings allocated to the priests in Numbers 18:8-11. The Talmud records that the sage Resh Lakish declared

One is allowed to buy Gentile slaves on the Sabbath in order to bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence.

A careful survey of Talmudic references to proselytes and proselytism indicates that, as with all important matters in life, opinions on this subject sometimes differed strongly and sharply. Kiddushin 72b points out that Rabbi Judah had a high opinion of proselytes and Rabbi Jose did not. But in general there is not the slightest shadow of a doubt that the prevailing feeling toward proselytes

was very favorable. Shabuot 39a states that the souls of future gerim were with the souls of the rest of the Jews at Mount Sinai when God made His covenant with Israel. The Midrashic stories of Abraham breaking the idols were very popular in the propaganda for "making souls," the phrase used in the Bible to describe Abraham's own proselytizing activities. The term "son of Abraham" is used in Midrash Rabba to Genesis 39:14 to designate the true convert. Interpreting Biblical history, the Midrash depicts many characters of the Bible as outstanding converts to Judaism. Tamar, the wife of Judah, the progenitor of the Messiah, is described as a proselyte. Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, is said to have converted Job. During the period when the conversion of Queen Helen of Adiabene was a major topic of rabbinic conversation, the story of Joseph and Asenath, his Egyptian wife, was often mentioned, for Asenath, too, was a symbol of the wholehearted convert. Such stories helped greatly in the propaganda of proselytization. One homily depicts Jethro as remarking to Moses, when the latter desires his father-in-law to remain with him, "I shall return to my city and there make proselytes, instruct them in Torah and lead them under the wings of the Shechina." Naaman, the Syrian general, is portrayed as a convert. Rahab, who aided in the conquest of her home city, Jericho, is pictured as having married Joshua and being the ancestress of the prophet Jeremiah. This is very significant because the Bible narrative states quite clearly that, prior to her conversion, Rahab had been a prostitute. Many prophets are spoken of as being the descendants of proselytes. Among them are Obadiah and Jonah. Haman's children, as well as Nebuchadnezzar's descendants, are pictured as converts teaching Torah in the villages of Judea. The great Tannaitic teacher, Rabbi Meir, is said to be a descendant of the anti-Jewish Roman emperor Nero. In this manner, the Midrash emphasizes that not only did the desire of these arch enemies of Israel to destroy the Jews come to naught but, in addition, their own families were won over to Judaism. Thus, according to these imaginative tales, the would-be conquerors were themselves conquered.

SOME TALMUDIC AND MIDRASHIC STATEMENTS

The following excerpts culled from the great wealth of homiletical material in the Talmud and Midrash will give the reader a kaleidoscopic picture of the favorable rabbinic attitude toward gerim in the centuries just preceding the beginning of the Middle Ages. Basing their statements on their interpretations of various Bible verses, the rabbis say

Precious in the sight of God are gerim for in every instance He speaks of them as if they were Israelites. Israelites are called servants, as it is written, Leviticus 25:55, "The children of Israel are My servants;" gerim are also called servants, as it is written, Isaiah 56:6, "Also the aliens that join themselves to the Lord, to minister unto Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants." Israelites are called friends of God, as it is written, Isaiah 41:8, "The seed of Abraham My friend;" gerim are also called friends of God, as it is written, Deuteronomy 10:18, "He [God] loves the gerim."

The rabbis interpret Psalm 128 as follows:

It does not say "Happy is Israel," "Happy are the priests," "Happy are the Levites," but (verse 1) "Happy is everyone that fears the Lord" because it refers to gerim, for all who fear the Lord are happy even as Israel is happy. The ger to whom it refers is the ger tsedek, the righteous ger, not the Samaritans, concerning whom it is stated (II Kings 17:41) "They feared the Lord and served their graven images."

(Verse 2) "When you eat of the labor of your hands, happy shall you be." This also refers to the ger, who cannot depend on the merit of his fathers. Perhaps he will say, "Since I cannot rely on the merit of my fathers, I can expect a reward for my good deeds only in this world." Therefore Holy Writ lets him know that by his own labor the ger may acquire the bliss of this world and also the bliss of the world to come . . .

(Verse 3) "Your children shall be like olive plants." Even as the olive tree produces olives for eating, olives for preserving and olives for illumination, and the light therefrom is brighter than that produced by any other oil, so there will come forth from the offspring of gerim masters of the Bible, masters of the Talmud, masters of social welfare; some of them will be scholars and some sages, and their children will endure forever . . . "Round about your table." Because of gerim, the merit of the children of Israel will be enhanced and they will obtain

added excellency.

(Verse 4) "Behold, surely thus shall the man be blessed that fears the Lord." This is well illustrated by Abraham and Sarah, both of whom were gerim. Because Abraham was a fearer of the Lord, he obtained God's blessing, as will all gerim who conduct themselves as did Abraham . . .

(Verse 6) "May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!" How will there be peace in Israel merely because a ger will see his children's children? The verse refers to a ger tsedek, a righteous proselyte who may marry his daughter to a priest, whose descendants will therefore be priests, who will bless Israel and say, "May the Lord bless thee . . . and give thee peace." Thus we find concerning Rahab the harlot: For having sheltered the spies and helped them to escape, the Holy One, praised be He, considered it as if she helped Him and gave her her reward. . . . And what was her reward? Her daughters married into the priesthood and their sons officiated at the altar and entered into the sanctuary and blessed Israel with the Ineffable Name.

Yalkut Shimoni (*Zot Haberacha*, section 961) pictures non-Jewish merchants as coming to Jerusalem and witnessing the entire Jewish nation following the same religious pattern of life. "What could be better," they ask themselves, "than to unite with a nation which itself is united religiously?" They came, they saw, they were convinced and converted. *Pesikta Rabbati* 35 tells how the angels said to God, "The Jews have been exiled because of idolatry. Now, among the nations, they will become more steeped in idolatry than before." "No," replies the Almighty, "now they will be ready to give up their lives to preserve their faith. They will also seek to attract others into the Divine Presence." This accords with the already mentioned declaration in *Pesachim* 87b that

God dealt kindly with Israel in scattering them among the nations for, because of this, gerim were added to Israel.

The proselyte who associates himself voluntarily with Israel won high praise from the rabbis

The ger is dearer to God than Israel was when the nation assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai. For Israel would not have accepted the Torah without seeing the thunders and the lightning and the quaking

mountain and hearing the sound of the shofar, whereas the proselyte, without a single miracle, consecrates himself to the Holy One, praised be He, and puts upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. Can anyone be deemed more worthy of God's love?

These very positive statements do not represent the unanimous opinion of Talmudic literature. At times, halaachic opposition was voiced to both converts and conversion. Some rabbis felt that no proselyte should be admitted in times of prosperity lest the desire to improve one's economic status be the motivating reason for the conversion. The Talmud maintains that no converts were accepted in the time of David, because of the suspicion that they were attracted by the king's military successes, nor in the time of Solomon, because of the prosperity which then prevailed. From this line of reasoning one is able to understand the rabbinic declaration that, in the Messianic time, converts will not be accepted. They argued that Gentiles will then be attracted not out of sincerity but because of the favor shown by God to the Jews. Also it was believed that, in the Messianic period, all mankind will acknowledge and worship the One God and, therefore, formal conversion will be unnecessary. The rabbis often defined the *ger toshab*, the religious "fellow traveller," the half-convert, as one who observes the Noachide commandments and the ethical precepts of Judaism and who feels no need for formal conversion.

The rabbis assert that converts will serve as witnesses for God on the Day of Judgment. They will attest that it was not necessary for the Gentiles to convert to Judaism in order to escape God's wrath (Aboda Zara 64b). It was only incumbent upon them to live as Noachides, as *gerey toshab*. There is no excuse, therefore, for those among the Gentiles who have sinned. Naturally, those who observed all 613 of the commandments of the Torah were considered the truly God-fearing persons. The rabbis took it for granted that not all Gentiles had the capacity to absorb and to observe all that was required. This was another reason why candidates for conversion were tested with great care.

The best known and most often quoted negative statement about converts to Judaism is that ascribed to Rabbi Chelbo and found

in Yebamot 47b and three other places in the Talmud, *Kashim gerim l'Yisrael k'tsapachat*, which means that "converts are as troublesome to Israel as the plague of leprosy." In the first place, Rabbi Chelbo, a Palestinian Amora, was writing in the period when the Roman Empire had just adopted Christianity as the official religion of the state and had published an edict making conversion to Judaism a punishable offense for both the converter and the converted. This in itself would be sufficient explanation for the vehemence of Rabbi Chelbo's statement. It had become extremely dangerous for a Jew living in the Roman Empire, as did Rabbi Chelbo, to attempt to convert a non-Jew. In the second place, if Rabbi Chelbo's statement was an accurate reflection of the current sentiment of his time and place, as under the circumstances just described it could very well have been, his own contemporaries would have agreed with him—but they did not. His own pupil, Rabbi Berachiah ha-Kohen, disagreed with him. The medieval commentators were completely puzzled by Rabbi Chelbo's remark. They give seven different explanations of why converts are as bad as leprosy and not a single one of these explanations accords with the majority opinion on converts found in the Talmud. Rabbi Chelbo's saying is only the opinion of an individual. He arrived at his opinion through his interpretation of Isaiah 14:1

And the ger shall join himself with them and they shall cleave (*v'nisp'chu*) to the house of Jacob.

Since the word *v'nisp'chu* and the Hebrew word for leprosy, *sapachat*, come from a common verbal root, Rabbi Chelbo formulated this uncomplimentary analogy. Later circumstances in the history of Judaism caused his opinion to gain increased importance.

There are a few other passages in the Talmud which are definitely and completely unfavorable to converts. Three such passages and the accusations which they level against converts are

1. Niddah 13b states that gerim delay the coming of the Mes-

siah. Just exactly how the gerim do this is not made clear; the Talmudic explanation follows the opinion of Rabbi Chelbo.

2. Yebamot 48b: Why do converts get into so many difficulties? The answers given are: Because, before they were converted, they did not observe the seven Noachide commandments. Because they are not as conversant with the commandments of the Torah as is a born Jew. Because they do not become Jews out of love but out of fear. Because it takes them too long to make up their minds to convert.
3. In Yebamot 109b, Rabbi Isaac declares, "Evil after evil comes on those who receive converts." It has been said that Rabbi Isaac's phrase refers to those Jews who induce individuals to convert without making them thoroughly aware of the serious consequences of their act. On the other hand, it is noted that, if the candidate displays a sincere desire to become a Jew and is refused admittance, the Jews who are responsible are punished, even as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were reproved for having refused to accept Timnah of the family of Esau as a convert. Therefore, the intent of Rabbi Isaac's statement may be that the whole matter of receiving converts should be handled with extreme caution.

The Jew is often warned to respect the feelings of the ger. "You should not say to him, 'Only yesterday you served idols and had swine's flesh in your teeth.' Do not taunt him for you, too, were a stranger in the land of Egypt." Likewise, no one should say to a descendant of converts, "Remember the deeds of your fathers." Moreover, even that convert who, through force of circumstances, had to return to his former faith was still regarded by the rabbis as a Jew. A passage in Philo summarizes well the rabbinical attitude

Those men who have left their country and friends and their relations for the sake of virtue and holiness ought not to be deprived of having another country and home and friends. . . . After they [the Jews] have given the proselyte an equal share in all their laws and privileges and communities . . . they must not give license to lan-

guage of jealousy or unbridled tongues, berating those beings whom the other has once looked upon as gods, lest the proselyte become exasperated at such treatment and, in return, utter impious language against the true and holy God.

The possibility that the rabbis were generally favorable to conversion but that the majority of the people were hostile or fearful or resentful of the strangers in their midst is quite plausible. It was therefore necessary for the rabbinical leaders to caution and advise their people not to be unfriendly toward nor to molest and antagonize the proselyte.

THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

As Christianity gradually gained ascendancy, the proselytizing activities of the Jews went into a correlated decline. As has been noted, after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman state, harsh measures were taken to stop Jews from converting non-Jews. The continuous enactment of similarly intentioned statutes throughout the Christian world and the severity with which they were carried into effect indicate that the authorities had great difficulty in curbing Jewish conversionist efforts. The irritation of the Roman authorities is reflected in the writings of the time. Rutilius Numatianus was the most bitter in his denunciations and accusations. Writing in the first quarter of the fifth century, he ends his diatribe with a lament that the Romans had ever conquered Judea for, as a result, the Jews have spread all over the Roman world and their beliefs have had a poisonous effect upon the intellectual and spiritual lives of their conquerors.

Roman attitudes toward converts to Judaism were not always hostile. Marcus Aurelius was tolerant of them for his philosophic outlook made him so. It is said that in 273 he took the convert Queen Zenobia of Palmyra captive and gave her a villa on the Tiber River. She spent her remaining days reading Jewish books and taking comfort from the hopes and prayers of her Jewish faith. The climate changed with the whim of the ruling monarch. The emperor Severus forbade conversion under heavy penalties. Later, in the early part of Caraculla's reign, even non-Jewish children

were permitted to become Jews. In that time, according to the Talmud, Rabbi Judah the Prince, the *Nasi* or Patriarch of Judea, concerned himself with converts. He graced with his presence the conversion ceremony of a number of women, making it an occasion worthy of note. It is also probable that the travels of various patriarchs to different communities were partly for the purpose of stimulating conversions.

As time went on, Jewish proselytization became more and more of a crime in the Christian world. The emperor Constantius, in 339, ordered the confiscation of the property and the expulsion of anyone who aided and abetted Christians to embrace Judaism. The marriage of a Jew to a Christian and the circumcision of even pagan slaves were crimes punishable by death. This set the pattern for the Christian's treatment of the Jew and his religion for many centuries to come.

In Babylonia, a country whose Jewish communities were growing even as those in the Roman world were now on the decline, Rav, (c.175-247), founder of the academy at Sura, permitted conversion even of those who came primarily for the purpose of marriage. He declared

Whosoever seeks to be converted should be accepted. Do not impugn the motives of gerim; perhaps they come for the sake of Heaven.

The Jews of Babylon considered themselves to be of purer racial stock than the Jews of Palestine. Yet we find, in Aboda Zara 64a, that whole villages asked for admission into the Jewish fold and were accepted. The self-government of the Jews under the authority of the Exilarch must have attracted many converts who wished to share the autonomous status accorded the Jews. Rabbi Ashi, head of the Sura academy from 375 to 427, expressed great surprise "that the inhabitants of Masa Mechasia (a suburb of Sura) see the glory of the Torah twice a year (during the great Kallah assemblies) and yet none has converted to Judaism." The city of Mahoza on the Tigris River was a Jewish community in which lived many descendants of proselytes. Sometime during the first half of the third century, Rabbi Zeira was preaching in Mahoza on the Feast

of Tabernacles. He declared that a convert is permitted to marry a female bastard. The congregation felt highly insulted and pelted Rabbi Zeira with their holiday *etrogim*, citrons. Later, Rava preached in the same community and atoned for the *faux pas* of his colleague by stating that a convert is permitted to marry the daughter of a priest. For thus raising the status of the convert in the mind of the community, "the people loaded him down with beautiful gifts."

As the Talmudic period drew to a close, the situation of the Jews in the lands to the East, in Babylonia and in the Arab countries, was getting better all the time while the lives of their fellow-Jews in the Christian countries of the West were becoming increasingly embittered. Yet, despite persecution and cruelty, the urge within the Jew to win others to his faith never completely died. One Christian council after another, such as the Fourth Council in Orleans in 541, decreed that any Jew who reconverted a baptized Jew or made a proselyte of a Christian or engaged a Gentile maid-servant was, as a minimum penalty, to lose all his property. The necessity of passing such laws indicates that the Jew had not given up the hope of bringing to the world the religious message which God had entrusted to him. The general tendency of approval of conversion is still very much in evidence in the beginning of Numbers Rabbah, composed after the end of the Talmudic period. An entire chapter of Numbers Rabbah is devoted to a defense of converts. Yet, probably as a result of the Christian interdictions against Jewish conversions, Jewish leaders were moved to adopt the kind of *laissez faire* policy toward conversion which became the standard pattern for the Jewish community almost down to the present day.

The Mechilta, oldest of Midrashic compilations, completed toward the end of the Tannaitic period, contains a passage (found in Mesichta d'Nezikin, chapter 18, section 1) with which this chapter will be fittingly concluded

There are four rows of angels who stand before the Throne of God and recite Scripture before Him continually. When they reach Isaiah 44:5, they recite and interpret this verse as follows: "One shall say,

'I am the Lord's'—these are Jews who are without sin; "and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob"—these are the righteous proselytes; "and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord"—these are repentant sinners; "and surname himself by the name of Israel"—these are the fearers of Heaven (i.e., those non-Jews who have not actually converted to Judaism but who believe in the principles of Judaism and live by them.)

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE POST-TALMUDIC PERIOD

by

DAVID J. SELIGSON

The completion of the Talmud was followed by the thousand-year darkness of the Middle Ages. Discriminatory legislation, harsh clerical edicts, the ignorance and prejudice of the masses combined to set the Jew apart as an unwelcome member of society, a despised, feared, abused "untouchable." In this kind of atmosphere, it was not possible for the Jew to proselytize with the same vigor and the same enthusiasm that had characterized his conversionist activities in the Biblical and Talmudic periods.

Yet even in the most benighted medieval times, when malice and murder were the order of the day, Jews never lost their faith that Judaism was destined to become the religion of all mankind, that in time the principles and ideals of Judaism would triumph over all who sought to destroy them. From the pen of Eleazar Kalir, among the earliest of the Jewish liturgical poets, came an exultant vision that brightened the Stygian blackness of his time. This poem, translated by Israel Zangwill, is now sung in our synagogues as a hymn of praise and dedication

All the world shall come to serve Thee
And bless Thy glorious Name
And Thy righteousness triumphant
The islands shall acclaim.

They shall build for Thee their altars,
Their idols overthrown,
And their graven gods shall shame them
As they bow to Thee alone.

THE MESSIANIC HOPE

In their abject condition, the pious found in Holy Scripture renewed courage and hope for the future triumph of Israel's faith. For example, in the 33rd chapter of Deuteronomy, the last will and testament of Moses, they found intimations of the victory of Judaism in the Messianic Age

And he [Moses] said: "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose from Seir unto them; He shone forth from Mount Paran and He came from the myriads holy; at His right hand was a fiery law unto them." (Deuteronomy 33:2)

This verse was cited by the medieval commentators as proof that there would be three revelations—one from Sinai to the Jews, one from Seir to the Christians (in Jewish medieval thought Seir was a synonym for Edom and Edom, in turn, was interpreted as referring to Christianity), and one from Paran to the Arabs. They believed that the third revelation to Muhammed had inaugurated a period which would culminate in the conversion of the world to the message conveyed in the original revelation, i.e., to Judaism.

Despised and abused by both Christian and Muslim, the Jews found strong consolation in their Messianic hope. They were confident that their persecutions would lead ultimately to the complete vindication and victory of the Mother Faith. Thus, Hai Gaon (Babylon, 939-1038), last of the great teachers of the academy of Pumbeditha, projects the vision

Thereafter will all Israel be prophets . . . and the remnant of the nations will accept Judaism, as it is said, "Then will I turn to the peoples a clear language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent" (Zephaniah 3:9); "and they will say, 'Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Lord . . . and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths.'" (Micah 4:2)

This vision of the "End of days" was attractive not only to Jews, whose faith had been tried by Israel's sorrows, but also to a considerable number of Christians, who were disheartened and disillusioned by the materialism and bloodthirsty cruelty characteristic of the so-called Christian monarchs and many of the clergy of their day. A great number of those who converted to Judaism were

slaves, and, more especially, female slaves. These were greatly impressed by the solicitude of Jewish law and Jewish masters for their honor and chastity, a solicitude not often found elsewhere. There were also male proselytes to Judaism, some from high stations in society. There were Christians, including a number of clergymen, who became Jews out of a conviction that it represented a superior faith and way of life.

Striking is the account of the conversion of a certain "Father Nestor," contained in an epistle which dates probably from the ninth century. The author of the epistle is described as "one who loved the Lord 'with all his heart and all his soul,' who despised the religion of the uncircumcised and their errors, and sought shelter under the wings of the Shechina, the Holy Presence." This proselyte is said to have made diligent inquiry of scholars of the various religions. Convinced of the lack of worth of his inherited faith, he wrote this epistle to present the theological reasons for his abandonment of Christianity. At the conclusion of his apologia, he makes this declaration of faith

I, Father Nestor, believe only in the God of heaven and earth, and in none who either was or will be born; and my only hope is that my soul may be united with Israel. O, may I be found worthy to witness their consolation, and to rejoice with them in their restoration. May my lot be cast among them here and hereafter.

This declaration strengthened the hearts of many Jews in the gloomy days when the light of Judaism was well-nigh extinguished by the depth of the misery into which they had been cast.

The beginning of the second millenium of the Common Era witnessed a revival of messianic hopes among Christians and Jews. In Jewish circles, there was a feeling that at any moment the Son of Man would appear, to redeem them from their suffering and cause their enemies to embrace the very religion which they sought to extirpate. Cryptic calculations and zealous searchings of the *Zohar*, a Jewish mystical work written in Spain at the end of the thirteenth century, intensified the hope for Jewish liberation and the ultimate regeneration of the entire human race through the one religion. According to the *Zohar*, there is in every soul a

nitsots, an emanation from God, which is continually striving to be reabsorbed into its original source. Whenever a Gentile decides to embrace Judaism, God selects a soul which has, as its special purpose, the inspiring of proselytes. He kisses it and sends it down to enter the body of the newcomer, who is thus aided to break away more easily from his previous spiritual imperfections. Ultimately, according to the Zohar, the number of righteous proselytes will increase greatly and the time will come when all the nations of the earth will clamor for the redemption that can be theirs only through acceptance of the God and the faith of Israel.

CONVERSIONS CONTINUE

The belligerent theological adversaries with whom the Jew had to contend daily were powerful indeed. Ground between the upper and nether millstones of a crusading Catholicism and a militant Islam, the Jew was forced to exert superhuman spiritual and moral strength in order to survive. Judaism's daughter religions did not make things easy for their old mother. Yet, even in times when the forces of Christianity seemed to be well on the way to world domination, Judaism often functioned as a strong irritant and a powerful counterattraction. The writings of the Church Fathers and the recurrent edicts of Church Councils show plainly how much the mother religion was feared. Salo Baron has pointed out that "as long as Jews were superior both in culture and economic standing to the large mass of the population—and this was the case in the earlier Middle Ages—there was great danger that intermarriage would result in the conversion of the Christian partner to Judaism rather than in the baptism of the Jewish partner." Even after the conversionist activities of the Jew had been curbed and disrupted, the Church continued to accuse the Synagogue of intensive Judaizing efforts among the Christian masses. These accusations were, perhaps, not so much a reflection of actual conditions as they were of the Church's feeling of inner guilt over the manner in which it was handling the obstinate followers of the God of Moses. The persistence and resistance of the Jew, in spite of all the pressures that were employed, were a constant challenge

to both the authority and durability of the Church. Theologically, this constituted a repudiation of the earlier Christian thesis that, in producing Christianity, Judaism had fulfilled its purpose and had no further part to play in the Divine plan. So a new theological answer had to be fashioned to explain away the continued existence of the Jew and Judaism. A basic doctrine of the Church, developed by medieval Christianity, is that the Jew is to be permitted to exist and to suffer indefinitely as a *testes veritates*, an everlasting symbol of what happens to a group which has rejected the Christian God. The Jews' progressive degradation and denigration are proper and just punishments for their having repudiated the newer dispensation, according to "the learned doctors" of medieval Rome. Over and over again, medieval Church authorities declared that it is not proper to kill a Jew but it is quite within the bounds of accepted civilized and Christian practice to insult, beat and rob him.

Despite the unending distortion, humiliation and abuse, Judaism continued to attract proselytes. Why? Why should anyone want to become a Jew in times and circumstances such as these? There were a number of reasons. There was the ambivalent reaction of the curious to a strange and mysterious faith, declared by its followers to have been given to a people carefully selected, a faith which was a continuing challenge to the truth of Christian dogma. For some Judaism took on the flavor of the exotic and the occult, the magical and the devilish, an esoteric discipline which was at one and the same time fascinating and alarming. There was a strong strain of agnosticism running through both Christianity and Judaism in the Middle Ages and such a cross-current would naturally sweep some dissatisfied souls from one camp into the other. Then, all through the Middle Ages, Church authorities forced Jewish scholars into theological disputations over the respective merits of Judaism and Christianity. This technique often boomeranged against its sponsors. When forced to do so, learned Jews were able to analyze Christian beliefs and rituals and to defend their own beliefs and rituals in a manner that frequently left their less scholarly and astute opponents wishing that they had never embarked on this kind of dialectical procedure. Jewish rationalism

infected the reasoning minds of both priest and noble and, in some cases, led to further study, conviction and conversion. Along with these factors was the continuing influence that the Bible, Hebrew and Hebraic lore exerted upon those non-Jews who were genuinely learned and genuinely interested in seeking for truth. So it was, that despite only meager and sporadic proselytizing efforts on the part of the oppressed Jew, some Christians found their way into the Jewish fold.

Medieval Jewish chroniclers did not (because, with the Christian censor looking over their writings, they could not) tell the full story of the brave non-Jews who, knowing the ostracism, obloquy and often martyrdom that awaited them, nevertheless cast their lot with that of the people of Abraham. What we know of these truly heroic spirits is gathered from scattered references in rabbinical responsa, Jewish historical narratives and necrologies, and hostile contemporary Christian sources. They were in very truth *gerey tsedek*, proselytes of righteousness, for none but a thoroughly convinced and dedicated person would have been capable of taking such a step in such an age.

"PROSELYTES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"

Limited space permits us to single out only a few of the Christians who became Jews in the earlier centuries of the Middle Ages.

At the beginning of the seventh century, a monk living in the monastery of Mount Sinai became convinced that he should change his faith. While doing penance, he is said to have had a vision in which he saw Jesus, the Apostles and martyrs standing on one side in thick darkness, and Moses, the Prophets and the Congregation of Israel standing on the other side in a sea of light. He interpreted the vision to mean that Judaism was endowed with a special Divine grace. Accordingly, he crossed the Sinaitic desert into Palestine and joined the Jewish community of Tiberias. He took the name of Abraham, a common practice among converts to Judaism, since, as indicated in a previous chapter, Abraham, in Jewish tradition, is regarded as the first proselyte and as the spiritual father of all proselytes. Abraham the Monk married, reared a

Jewish family and was a zealous proponent of his new religion.

Bishop Alemann Bodo, court chaplain of the Frankish emperor Louis I the Pious, following a general custom of the clergy of his day, left the Carolingian court in 839 in order to make a pilgrimage to Rome and to receive the blessing of the Holy Father. It is not known whether or not he ever got to Rome but it is certain that he did not return to the French court. Instead he went to the Muslim city of Saragossa, Spain, openly espoused Judaism, married a Jewish woman and became an officer in the Saragossan military forces.

In 1005, a priest, Wecelinus, court chaplain in the retinue of the German emperor Henry the Second, became convinced, after many years of study, of the superiority of Judaism. He gave up his position, converted to Judaism and went to live with the Jews of Mainz. He wrote a bitter denunciation of his former religion. The emperor, greatly angered, ordered another of his priests to compose a fitting reply, which the monk did in equally undignified and unrestrained language. In 1012, the emperor expelled the Jews from Mainz. There are some who maintain that Wecelinus' conversion was partially responsible for the decree of expulsion. Whether this is so or not, it is true that many Church councils used real or imagined proselytizing activities on the part of the Jews as an excuse to increase the severity of laws against Jews.

In the eleventh century, a French girl from a wealthy and prominent family decided to embrace Judaism. Leaving her home and loved ones, she made her way to Narbonne, formally entered the Jewish fold and was married in the Jewish faith. Some months later, informed that her non-Jewish kindred were determined to take vengeance upon her, she fled with her husband to another city where they lived for several years. Still later, her husband and children were slain in one of the anti-Jewish massacres which were all too common in the Middle Ages. This story was found by Solomon Schechter, at the end of the nineteenth century, in a document in the Cairo Geniza. (*Geniza* is an Aramaic word meaning "storage place" or "treasure house." It is a synagogal repository for all Hebrew documents, prayer books, letters and manuscripts which

cannot be destroyed because they contain the Hebrew name of God.) The Geniza document ends with a plea to the Jewish community to support the destitute widow.

Also found by Schechter in the Cairo Geniza was a Hebrew prayer book, written by the hand of Obadiah the Norman, convert to Judaism. Obadiah seems to have come to Jerusalem in 1096 with the soldiers of the First Crusade. He was converted to Judaism in 1102. Meticulously copying the sacred words of the Hebrew prayers for his own use was Obadiah's way of expressing his joy and devotion for having reached the Holy Land spiritually as well as physically. The ruins on Mount Zion had conquered one of its conquerors.

THE KHAZARS

This same Cairo Geniza contained documents that shed additional light on the history of the Khazars, a people in southern Russia who were converted to Judaism in the eighth century. This was the most important mass conversion to Judaism during the entire Middle Ages. The Khazar kingdom endured for at least three centuries as a Jewish state. There are Jews living today in the Russian Caucasus who are believed to be direct descendants of the Khazars.

The Khazars were a powerful, warlike people who seem to have been part of the vast nomadic Hun empire that extended all the way from the borders of China to present-day Hungary. From the sixth century on, the Khazars occupied most of the region between the Black and Caspian Seas. At the height of its power, the kingdom covered most of present-day Ukraine, including the important city of Kiev. Sometime during the eighth century (the date usually given is about 740), Khakan (king) Bulan and his court adopted Judaism as the official religion of their country. As a result, a substantial portion of the people voluntarily became Jews.

Much of the source material for this historical episode is based on correspondence between Chasdai ibn Shaprut, eminent tenth century Spanish Jewish statesman, and the then reigning Khazar ruler, Khakan Joseph. According to Khakan Joseph, Bulan was

dissatisfied with the pagan religion of his ancestors. In a dream he was promised great victories in war if he would embrace the true religion. He invited sages of the three major religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, to expound before him the merits of their respective faiths. Having become persuaded of the superiority of Judaism, he and thousands of his people were circumcised and began to live as Jews.

The account of the conversion of the Khazars, discovered by Schechter in the Cairo Geniza, differs from that of Khakan Joseph and is believed to be closer to the actual facts. According to this document, Jews seeking refuge from Byzantine persecution settled in the Khazar kingdom and intermarried with the natives. It was the rule among the Khazars that, upon the death of their ruler, the bravest of their generals was selected as the next Khakan. A Jewish general, who had distinguished himself in battle, was accordingly chosen Khakan. After being raised to the throne, he made known his adherence to Judaism. It was at this point that the disputation among the rival creeds took place, after which Judaism was declared to be the official religion. Succeeding Khakans carried on the Jewish tradition. One, Obadiah, is reported to have set up many synagogues and schools for the study of Bible and Talmud, which resulted in the acceptance of Judaism by almost the entire population. The Khazars were ardently missionary and sent trained representatives into the surrounding areas to spread the teachings of Judaism.

Attacks by the Byzantines and Russians gradually weakened the Khazars so that, after the tenth century, their power began to decline. Most scholars believe that, by the end of the eleventh century, the Khazars were completely under the domination of the Russians. Some scholars insist that the Khazars retained their independence until well into the thirteenth century. The 30,000 Mountain or Daghestan Jews of the Russian Caucasus believe themselves to be directly descended from the Jewish Khazars. According to the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, "The Mountain Jews are a virile and good-looking people, graceful and supple in their movements. There are beautiful women among them. The

width of chest of the Mountain Jews exceeds that of any other group of Jews, and the number of tall men among them is twice as great as that of medium-sized people. Remarkable is their great longevity; many reach the age of 100 to 120 years, retaining their sound teeth, their hair and 'eagle eyes.' Some of them still have, in accordance with Biblical custom, two or three wives. In family and social life the Mountain Jews show great solidarity (one for all, all for one). Hospitality is one of their first principles. Furthermore, they are great nature-lovers, wonderful story-tellers, and amazingly talented dancers and musicians."

The religious disputation before the Khazar Khakan forms the background for one of the outstanding Jewish books of the Middle Ages, the *Sefer Hakuzari*, *Book of the Khazars*, written by Judah Halevi, Spanish Jewish philosopher of the twelfth century. In Book 4, Section 23, of *Hakuzari*, one finds the thoughts of Judah Halevi regarding the ultimate victory of Judaism

God, it is true, has a secret and wise design concerning us. It may be compared to the wisdom hidden in the seed which falls into the ground and is apparently transformed into earth, water and dung without leaving a trace—so it seems to the beholder. But, in reality, this seed transforms earth and water into its own substance, carrying them from one degree to another until it refines the elements and makes them like unto itself, casting off all external matter in order that the heart of the plant may be retained in purity and become fit to receive the power and the form of the pristine seed, so that the tree ultimately resulting may bear fruit resembling that from which it has been produced. So it is with the religion of Moses: All later religions will be transformed into it, though externally they may reject it. They merely serve to introduce and pave the way for the expected Messiah; he is the fruit; all will be his fruit, if they acknowledge him; and all will become one tree.

ISLAM

As the Bible indicates, social and commercial relationships between the Arabic lands and the Jews of Israel were already well established in the time of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Many Jews went south from Judea and settled in various parts of the Arabian peninsula. These immigrants grew so numerous that they were able to establish independent Jewish tribes and to build for

themselves fortified cities, such as Yathrib in the north, site of recent archeological excavations, and Sabea, Sanaa and Mariba in the southwest. These Jewish tribes, the Banu al Nadir and Banu Kuraiza, were very proud of their origin. They claimed to be direct descendants of Aaron and referred to themselves as *al-Kahinani*, "the priests." They were deeply attached to their new home and, except for their religion, were, in all respects, like their non-Jewish countrymen. They spoke Arabic, were interested in Arabic culture, and, when necessary, fought wars with other tribes in typical desert warrior fashion. In the same fashion, they later boasted in song and story of their prowess on the field of battle. On the whole, however, their relations with their Arab neighbors were very amicable.

Through contacts with these Jewish tribes, Arabs became familiar with the Bible narratives, especially with those portions which described the common ancestry of Arab and Jew. Arab merchants brought back to their homes not only the merchandise which they had traded from the Jews but also the stories of the Jews and the ideas of Judaism, such as the belief in One God, immortality, the Messiah. We are told that it was not uncommon for Arab women, when their children became ill, to pray to the God of the Jews and to make a vow that, if the child recovered, it would worship the God of the Jews. It was not at all unusual, in pre-Islamic times, for an Arab to accept the Jewish faith.

In the competitive attempts of Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism to gain the intellectual attention of the Arab, Jewish monotheism was more in keeping with Arab religious psychology than Christian trinitarianism or Zoroastrian dualism. The Jewish tradition that the Messiah had not yet come was also a welcome idea to the Arabs who, together with the Jews, were oftentimes on the receiving end of the arrogant and brutal attempts of Roman Christian invading armies to convince them that the God the conquerors worshipped was the Messiah who had already come.

An Arab chronicler, Abu Ishak, tells of the efforts of a Jewish propagandist who argued with the heathen Arabs about reward and punishment, resurrection, Paradise and Hell. The outcome

of the discussion is not recorded but, undoubtedly, there were many Arabs who began to doubt the wisdom of their pagan superstitions. Very early, the Arabs adopted the Jewish custom of praying three times daily with their faces turned toward Jerusalem. Some gave up their idols and adopted the moral code of Judaism. The worship of *jinn*s, the sacrifice of infant girls and other heathen practices were discarded.

About 350 CE, the famed Yemenite ruler, Abu Kariba Assad, undertook a military campaign against Persia and the Arabian provinces of the Byzantine empire. As he marched northward, he conquered the city of Yathrib, left it in charge of his son and continued his advance. When word reached him that his son had been assassinated and his occupying force in Yathrib driven out, he returned and laid siege to the rebellious city. The Jews and Arabs of Yathrib resisted so bravely that the king was unable to subdue them. Stricken with a severe illness and worn out by his arduous campaigning, Abu Kariba was visited by two *Khaberim*, Jewish wise men, of Yathrib who persuaded him to pardon the city's inhabitants and lift the siege. They did more. They converted him to Judaism. In the typical manner of that time, the king then ordered his army to accept Judaism as its official religion. He took the two *Khaberim* back to Yemen with him and, under their guidance, he converted his entire kingdom to Judaism. Whether the adherence of the entire people to Judaism was ever more than superficial is extremely doubtful. Nevertheless, for nearly two hundred years thereafter, Yemen was, theoretically at least, a Jewish kingdom.

The most zealous Jewish proselytizer among the Yemenite kings was one whose name was Yussuf, Joseph, but who is better known in history by his nickname Dhu Nowas, "curly locks." Dhu Nowas ruled Yemen from 520 to 525. He attempted to convert various neighboring tribes to Judaism by force. When word of this reached Ethiopia, the Christian army of that country was dispatched to Yemen to put an end to its monarch's conversionist activities. In the battle which ensued, Dhu Nowas was defeated. He committed suicide by riding his steed over a cliff into the sea. With his death,

the period during which Judaism was the official state religion of Yemen came to an end.

The founder of Islam, the prophet Muhammed (570-632), delivered his new faith to a people which had been prepared for it by their contacts with Jews and Judaism. The great influence of Judaism upon the thinking and writings of Muhammed himself has often been pointed out. The Koran records, in many places, the Hebrew words and concepts which Muhammed had absorbed as he listened to the discussions of the Jews in the bazaars of Mecca. Rachman (the Merciful God), Gehinna, Shechinah, Gan Eden, Tsedakah and many other Hebrew words are familiar to the student of the Koran. It records many sayings found in Scripture, Talmud and Midrash. Muhammed adopted and adapted many of the important Jewish ritual practices, such as the Sabbath and the dietary laws.

At first, the Jews reacted cordially to the preachments of Muhammed. They thought that he was on his way into Judaism and that many Arabs would join him in this pilgrimage. They were wrong. He turned his fellowcountrymen away from Jerusalem and toward Mecca. At first friendly toward the Jews, he became gradually more hostile as they refused to accept him as their chief prophet, as they refused to concede that Islam would supersede completely both Christianity and Judaism. In 624, he began a war of annihilation against the Jewish tribes of Arabia. By 628 his victory was complete. The Banu al-Nadir and Banu Kuraiza had ceased to exist. Those Jews who remained alive were reduced to positions of servitude. Jews were forbidden, under pain of death, to convert a Muslim to Judaism. Such has been and is the law of Islam from that time to this. Under this same law, any Muslim who converts of his own free will is likely to suffer confiscation of all his worldly goods and, if his ruler so decrees, death.

This did not scare away all Muslims from Judaism. Occasionally, one converted and joined the Jewish community. That he was not always well received by the Jews is evident from the contents of a letter written by the great Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204). Written in Egypt, it is addressed to Obadiah, a convert from Islam, who had asked the

great Rambam for support and encouragement against those who sneered at his Muslim origin. Maimonides contrasts the eternity of Israel with the transiency of other creeds. He castigates Obadiah's Jewish teacher for having shamed his student-proselyte and states that the teacher should beg pardon of his pupil and undergo fasting and penance that God may forgive him. Maimonides continues

He who called you a fool surprises me greatly. A man who has left father and mother, forsaken his birthplace and his country and has attached himself to a lowly, despised and enslaved race, who recognizes the truth and righteousness of this people's law and who has cast the things of this world from his heart, shall such a one be called "fool"? God forbid. Not witless but wise does God consider you, disciple of Abraham our father, who also abandoned his faith and his kindred to follow the way of God. And He Who blessed Abraham will bless you and make you worthy to behold all the consolations designed for Israel. And in all the good that God shall do unto us, He will also do good unto you.

"AL KIDDUSH HA-SHEM"

During these Dark Ages, many converts endured great suffering for the sake of their new faith. They were forced to bear not only the unrestrained hatred of their former coreligionists but also, oftentimes, the ill concealed suspicion and distrust of many of their newfound brethren. But the genuinely pious and understanding among the Jews held the proselyte in high regard. Eloquent testimony to this fact is contained in the various *Memorbuecher*, memorial volumes, of the German Jewish communities. Such *Memorbuecher* preserved the names of the victims of the Crusades as a fitting tribute to the memory of those who had died *al kiddush ha-Shem*, "for the sanctification of God's Name," for the preservation of Judaism. In these lists, proselytes are unmistakably identified by being referred to as "the child of our Father Abraham." The *Memorbuch* of Mainz lists ten proselytes killed by the Crusaders, seven men and three women. Of a certain proselyte who became a rabbi, Rabbi Abraham of Augsburg, the record tells that "he rejected the gods of the peoples, and broke off the heads of the images, was confident of life eternal, and was tortured greatly and

burned for the Unity of the Name." Among the proselyte-martyrs of the Rhine Valley was a Frenchman known as "Abraham, son of Abraham our Father . . . who had been head friar of all the bare-foot friars" and who was burned at the stake by Christian zealots. The Church authorities were singularly unimaginative in dealing with these ecclesiastical rebels. After a trial which was a legal mockery, they turned them over to the civil police, who sometimes strangled and then burned them and, at other times, burned them without benefit of strangling. Particularly annoying to the medieval Christian was the fact that there was no material advantage to be gained by the Christian who became a Jew, which was quite the contrary of the reward of the Jew who became a Christian. Another annoyance was the fact that most of those who defected from Christianity did so at a mature age, after having studied both Christianity and Judaism thoroughly, and after having arrived at an unshakable intellectual conviction that Judaism has in its teachings more of the ring of truth than does Christianity.

Jews lived fairly peacefully in England for more than a century after the Norman conquest in 1066. The First and Second Crusades did not create any great enthusiasm among the islanders. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a number of Englishmen were attracted to Judaism and were converted. The first large-scale outbreak against English Jewry occurred at the time of the coronation of Richard the Lion-hearted in 1189. It was caused by the anti-Jewish fulminations of Thomas à Becket. Although King Richard was opposed to these religious excesses, he was unable to curb them. The riots culminated in the massacre of the Jewish community of York in 1190. From that time on, until their total expulsion in 1290, the Jews of England lived in constant terror. Yet, while the riots were at their height, a group of English proselytes organized a Jewish congregation and suffered martyrdom as a result. The chronicler Ephraim of Bonn writes, "In a certain city where there were many proselytes—twenty-two men forming a congregation of proselytes—they slew them all. Not a single one soiled himself with the vile waters (of baptism), but they all died 'for the sanctification of God's Name.'"

Among those who were converted were two English monks of the Cistercian order. The manner of the Church's reaction to such an event may be gathered from the language of a contemporary Christian chronicler:

A certain Cistercian monk or rather a certain demoniac in our times being, as it were, tired of the Catholic faith and worn out with the sweet and light burdens of Christ's yoke and scorning, at the instigation of the devil, any longer to walk in the way of salvation . . . as if phrenetic and mad and truly turned to insanity, fled to the synagogue of Satan. To cut short the whole wretched story, he caused himself to be circumcised according to the Jewish rite and, as a most vile apostate, joined himself to his damnation to the enemies of the cross of Christ.

And, on the northern border of England, in the Geroudon House of the same order,

a certain brother, likewise in our own days, by a similar error or rather madness, fled with ruinous and ruin-bearing ways to Judaism, the home of damnation.

In 1222, the citizens of Oxford witnessed the burning of a former Catholic deacon who had studied Hebrew literature and had been led, through his studies, to enter the covenant of Abraham. In 1275, during the reign of Edward the First, a Dominican monk, Robert de Reddinge (Robert of Reading), a famous pulpit orator, studied Hebrew to aid him in his attempts to convert Jews to Christianity. The trapper of souls was himself entrapped. He underwent circumcision, converted, took the name of Haggai and married an attractive Jewish girl. Summoned to answer for his apostasy, he defended his new faith with great warmth and ability. King Edward handed him over for punishment to the Archbishop of Canterbury who, after the usual mock trial, is reported to have delivered him to the Sheriff of Oxfordshire for burning. The Dominicans, enraged by Robert's conversion and by the taunts of their rival order, the Franciscans, incited the queen mother, Eleanor, to expel the Jews from her province of Cambridge. A little more than ten years later, King Edward the First purged his entire kingdom of these stiff-necked worshippers of the One God.

CONTEMPORARY JEWISH ATTITUDES

It is easy to understand why some Jewish sages, concerned about the survival of their people amidst the pressures of such a hostile environment, were reluctant to accept converts. The responsa of Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg, Germany (c.1220-1293), indicate that Jews, as a matter of self-defense, were sometimes not too cordial in their treatment of newcomers to the faith. Nevertheless, they were expected to protect the proselyte from the common enemy in every possible way. The following two responsa of Rabbi Meir indicate the mixed feelings of even well-meaning Jews toward those who voluntarily attached themselves to Judaism

Question: Some members of the community took an oath that B is a proselyte. As a result B was arrested and was ransomed for thirty marks to which amount A contributed his share. A now demands that the members who caused B's arrest refund him his money, since he was not among those who caused B's arrest by their oath.

Answer: The members who took the oath are free from any obligation to A since A paid his part voluntarily.

Question: A, a convert to Judaism, was arrested. The Jews B, C, D and E, who were summoned to testify under oath as to A's identity, were threatened with confiscation of their property if they refused to tell the truth. They, therefore, admitted that A was a convert and avoided the taking of a false oath. Luckily, A escaped being burned at the stake (concerning which Rabbi Meir expresses his astonishment "since not even one out of a thousand in such circumstances ever escaped such a fate") and suffered only a financial loss. Now A demands that B, C, D and E make good the loss that befell him owing to their testimony.

Answer: B, C, D and E must repay A for his losses sustained because of their testimony. Their testimony involved A's life and their duty was to disregard the possible monetary loss to themselves and to save A's life, even though it would involve the taking of an apparently false oath. They should have modified

their statement mentally so that it would have been no longer false, or they could have nullified the false oath by a whispered statement.

Because of fear of Christian reprisals, some Jewish communities enacted stringent *takanot*, communal ordinances, which forbade Jews to attempt to make proselytes. Indeed, some Jews went so far as to denounce to the government Christians whom they believed entertained leanings toward Judaism. Rabbi Gershom ben Jacob (Germany, 13th century) was among those who wanted to do everything possible to avoid offending Gentile feelings. He advised his followers that they were never to start an argument with a non-Jew or seek to convert a non-Jew to Judaism. Nevertheless, being well aware of the Talmudic injunctions with regard to the acceptance of proselytes, he endeavored to keep his advice within the limits of established Jewish tradition. In his book, *Remembrance of the Covenant*, after pointing out the difficulties and hardships of being Jewish, "especially at this time when there is danger to life," he nonetheless affirms that "if the applicant says, 'I know that this is so and I am ready to take the risk,' he must be received. Three times he is to be denied but, in the end, he is to be accepted."

In general, the medieval Jewish authorities based their opinions on the Talmudic regulations concerning converts. The tendency of the more timid and cautious was to dissuade and discourage those who sought to enter the Jewish fold, but most of the outstanding commentators of the medieval period regarded converts favorably.

Thus, in the *Tanchuma*, a collection of Midrashim dating from the eighth century, we find the following comment on Genesis 12:5 "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and his nephew Lot, and all the substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had made in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan"

Abraham used to give food to the wayfarers who came his way. After they had eaten, they would bless him. Abraham would respond: "Why are you blessing me? Bless the Master of this house Who has

given you not only food and drink but your very breath." The guests would say: "Where is this Master?" Abraham would answer: "He rules in heaven and upon earth; He gives life and causes death; He wounds and He heals. He places the child in his mother's womb and brings him forth; He causes the flowers and the trees to grow; He places the dead in the grave and, in His own time, will also bring them forth." The strangers would then ask how one should bless the Master and win His favor. Abraham would reply: "Say 'Blessed be He Who is to be blessed forever and ever.'" Abraham taught non-Jews reverence for God and he taught them Torah. This is what Scripture means when it refers to the souls whom Abraham made in Haran.

Talmud Yebamot 24b states that those who convert to Judaism in a time and place where the Jews are strong politically and militarily are not considered genuine converts. Therefore, converts were not accepted in Israel during the reigns of David and Solomon. On this passage, the great codifier, the RIF, Rabbi Isaac al Fasi (Morocco and Spain, 1013-1103), makes the following observation

It is understandable that, in the time of David and Solomon, those who wished to convert were looked upon with suspicion; but, in a time like ours, when Israel is poor and lowly, we receive converts without inquiring so carefully into the motives that impel the convert to come to us. We should not be amazed over the fact that Hillel accepted a convert who came to him and said: "Convert me in order that I may have an opportunity to become your High Priest." For in Hillel's time, too, the Jews were in great trouble, and so any non-Jew, who, for any reason, wished to become a Jew, could be accepted. It must be said that many who have come into Judaism with unworthy motives have, as a result of following the Jewish way, become the worthiest of Jews. This must have been the way Hillel felt about those who wished to convert from what may have seemed to be unworthy motives.

Of the inspiring portion in Isaiah 56:6-7 "Also the aliens that join themselves to the Lord, to minister unto Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keeps the sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast to My covenant: Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples," REDAK, Rabbi

David Kimchi (Southern France, c.1160-1235), grammarian, stern critic of Christian "Old Testament" exegesis, writes

As one who invites a guest into his house is to receive his guest with joy, so God says to the priests that they should receive with joy those who come to His Holy Temple to be converted to Judaism. It also refers to the joy which the converts themselves feel when they find themselves in God's house, sharing as recognized equals in the worship and the sacrifices that are offered there. If, as Solomon says (First Kings 8:41-43), God answers the prayer of the non-Jew who turns toward the Temple in Jerusalem when he prays, how much the more will He be sure to answer the prayer of him who comes to the Temple and becomes one with the people and religion of Israel.

Leviticus 23:42 states that only the "home-born" in Israel are to celebrate the Fall harvest festival by dwelling in *sukkot*, booths. Does this mean that a convert is not to participate in the Sukkot holiday? "Absolutely not," writes RAMBAN the exegete, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Muslim Spain, 1194-1270).

There is no intention in this verse of excluding converts from dwelling in booths on Sukkot. The Torah says over and over that there shall be the same law for the born-Jew and the convert. The Scripture here simply means that everyone who lives in a Jewish home must use the *sukkah*. It will not be sufficient for just one member of the family to dwell in the *sukkah* and for the remainder to stay in the house. There are those who say that the word "home-born" here means those who are worthy members of the household, to the exclusion of sea-farers and wanderers.

In the book, *Brightness of the Firmament*, by RASHBAZ, Rabbi Simon ben Zemach Duran (Algiers, 1361-1444), one reads this comment on Deuteronomy 10:19 "Love the ger"

It is a *mitsva*, commandment, to love the convert more than one loves the rest of Israel. . . . One wonders why the reception of converts was not included among the positive commandments to indicate that the Jew welcomes converts and does not spurn them. As Yebamot 47 states, "He is to be received immediately." Receiving a proselyte is a *mitsva* which should be handled with special care.

Of especial interest are the comments of the best known and most often quoted Jewish Biblical and Talmudic exegete, RASHI, Rabbi Solomon Isaac (Eastern France, 1040-1105). He must have had both good and bad experiences with converts because the favor-

able comments which he makes in some places are counterbalanced by unfavorable comments in other places.

Rashi seems to have taken literally the Talmudic statement of Rabbi Chelbo that "proselytes are as bad for Israel as the plague." Referring to this, Rashi says that proselytes cause trouble because they are unlearned in the *mitsvot* and, therefore, set a bad example for more learned born-Jews. "Also," he writes, "I have heard another opinion, i.e., that Jewish genealogies get all mixed up because of gerim. If it were not for the gerim, Jewish family genealogies could be traced more accurately." In another comment, he says that Rabbi Chelbo means that proselytes are difficult to handle because sometimes they cling to their former beliefs and cause Jews to accept these erroneous beliefs.

The French Tosephist, Rabbi Abraham the Proselyte, objected vigorously to Rashi's various interpretations of Rabbi Chelbo's remark. "The reason that Rabbi Chelbo wrote as he did," argued Rabbi Abraham the Proselyte, "is because gerim are so well versed in the *mitsvot* and are so observant of them that God gets angry because born-Jews are not as conscious of their religious obligations as are proselytes and God punishes the born-Jews for their negligence."

In other portions of his writings, Rashi takes a more kindly attitude toward the proselyte. Commenting on the Talmudic law that, when Jewish captives are to be redeemed from Gentile captivity, the redemption of the female convert takes precedence over the redemption of a female slave of Jewish birth, Rashi remarks, "Female converts are very careful to behave in a socially acceptable manner, because they wish to have a good reputation so that they will be able to obtain a Jewish husband. This is not the way it is with slave-girls."

Referring to Ruth 1:18, "When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she ceased arguing with her," Rashi restates the Talmudic position: "This is a good example of what our tradition means when it says that we should not teach too much to one about to be converted and should not be too demanding."

Perhaps the most penetrating observation made by Rashi on the subject of gerim is his comment on First Chronicles 29:15, "We are gerim before Thee and sojourners, as were all our forebears; our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding"

This is similar to the passage in Leviticus 25:23 "The land is Mine; for you are but gerim and sojourners with me." David was saying, "Both we and our fathers are gerim and sojourners in the world." Of a truth, the Scripture is telling us that everything in the heavens and upon earth belongs to God.

Perhaps this passage indicates that, in somewhat veiled language, Rashi was trying to say: The Jew, like all other human beings, is a ger, a stranger, living in a portion of the universe which he occupies only temporarily and which does not really belong to him. Since this is so, why should the Jew feel that he is, in any way, better than anyone else? If he is different, it is only in the sense that he believes that he has a God-given mission to complete. If this is so, should not every other ger who comes to him and expresses a desire to help him accomplish this mission be made to feel most welcome?

FARAWAY PLACES

Fascinating and little known tales of Jewish history and of conversion to Judaism revolve around the development and growth of Jewish communities in Asia and Africa. A whole volume could be written on this subject. Its treatment here must of necessity be broad and brief.

India

Tradition and folklore as well as authentic history are merged in the story of the Jews of India. From Cochin on the Malabar Coast to the Bombay Presidency and straight across the subcontinent of India to Calcutta and on to Rangoon in Burma, there is a curious assortment of Jews, black, white and brown, who claim ancient Jewish patrimony but who are, in reality, mostly descendants of converts to Judaism.

The origin of the Cochin community is shrouded in obscurity.

The visitor is shown an alleged early record or history book which represents their ancestors as having arrived in Malabar after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Obvious interpolations and the existence of many versions of the same story cast doubt upon the veracity of this document. Authentic, however, is the first royal charter, engraved on plates of copper, whereby a territory named Anjuvannam is conveyed by the reigning monarch to one Joseph Rabban and to his heirs in perpetuity together with the privileges of nobility and rights of revenue. This document, scholars assert, suggests an early date of settlement, possibly the sixth or seventh centuries, and the existence of an old and affluent community which won royal recognition. There are three distinct color strains in the present remnants of this ancient community. The White Jews are of Iraqui origin. The Black Jews consist of two classes, the *M'yukkasim*, those of ancient and pure pedigree, and the *Enam M'yukkasim*, the descendants of manumitted slaves. The first of these, whose people are brown or copper-colored, regard themselves as the oldest of the three groups. They maintain that their ancestors came to the Malabar Coast in the first century of the Common Era. The other class of Black Jews, which is truly black in color, comes from the offspring of mixed unions with manumitted female slaves, augmented by the descendants of purely Gentile slaves who converted to Judaism.

China

In Isaiah's vision of the restoration of the Jews to their ancestral land occurs the utterance, Isaiah 49:12, "Behold these shall come from afar; and these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim." The land of Sinim is said to be China. Some medieval commentators maintain that Isaiah had in mind those Jews who trekked a distance of ten thousand miles from the River Jordan, through the Caucasus, Turkestan and Tibet to the Yellow River in China. Conjecture and legend abound about this far-off community of Jews. Tartar travellers of the ninth century provide the first reliable records. Apparently, Jews had settled in China prior to the erection of the Second Temple and

the re-establishment of the Jewish commonwealth by Ezra in the fifth century BCE. S. M. Perlmann, in his *History of the Jews in China*, reports that "the Jews themselves asseverate that their ancestors immigrated into China at the time of the Han Dynasty, 25-221 CE." They called themselves "*Tiao-kin-kiao*" which means "The sect which extracts the sinew," a reference to Genesis 32:33. Various inscriptions on Jewish memorial stones, placed at the site of the synagogue in Kai-fung-fu, capital of the province of Honan, throw light on the history of the Jews in China, their growth and decline.

These inscriptions or tablets, first reported by a Jesuit missionary in the seventeenth century, indicate that there was a period when Chinese Jews actively propagated our faith in their communities. The inscriptions have a propagandistic tone, referring to the excellencies of the "Religion of Truth and Purity" and commending it to all Chinese. Concerning the Bible, one tablet attests, "These sacred Books concern not only Jews but all men, kings and subjects, parents and children, old and young; differing little from our laws, they are summed up in the worship of Heaven, the honor of parents and the veneration of ancestors." Another inscription, dated 1666 and attributed to a Mandarin who became Minister of State of his province, begins with an account of Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses and tells of the settlement of the Jews in China, bringing their history down to the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1642.

The lack of religious education contributed to the deterioration of the Chinese Jewish community. In the course of time Chinese Judaism became diluted with Buddhism and Confucianism. The last rabbi of the community of Kai-fung-fu died in 1800. Nothing remains of this once proud and flourishing Jewish community except a few stone tablets, some manuscripts and records, and a portion of one of their Torah scrolls, written in Chinese, now preserved in the library of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Africa

There seem to have been three separate migrations of Jews into Ethiopia: in the time of Solomon, after the Destruction of the First Temple and after the Destruction of the Second Temple. The conversion of the Queen of Sheba to Judaism is recorded in Abyssinian annals. Walter Plowden, in his *Travels in Abyssinia*, states, "It is highly probable that the whole of Abyssinia was of Jewish persuasion previous to its conversion (to Christianity), as even those who have adopted the Christian creed still retain numerous Jewish forms and observances." The Jewish dynasty, beginning with the Queen of Sheba and her son, Menelik the First, lasted for approximately thirteen centuries until the country was won by Christianity in 330 CE. The battle between the adherents of Judaism and the tribes converted to Christianity was bitter and prolonged. Forced to live in the mountain fastnesses, the Jewish Abyssinians or Falashas, as they are now known, adhered steadfastly to their faith. Testifying to their durability is the fact that present-day Falasha communities are in close contact with the new State of Israel. Student interchanges are taking place. Israeli teachers are working in Ethiopia to strengthen the bonds of faith and culture that exist between Ethiopia's Jews and world Jewry.

There was no lack of Jewish missionary effort in the rest of the continent of Africa. The skin pigmentation of many modern North African Jews and the religious practices of many African non-Jews indicate that much intermarriage and interchange of religious ideas and practices took place in this vast area and that a far-flung missionary work was carried on for a long period of time. There is an abundance of legends and popular folktales all over the hinterlands of Egypt and North Africa to indicate the influence of Judaism on the native peoples. In East Sudan there is a black-skinned population which observes the Jewish Sabbath. Among some Berbers, the sheaves which fall by the wayside at harvest time are left for the poor and the stranger, in fulfillment of the Biblical injunction. Jewish customs are found among the Tuaregs and the numerous Negro tribes in the Nigeria basin. In the Congo, Guinea and Dahomey, as well as among the tribes in

the region of Cape Verd, Judaistic influences are discernible in the rites and customs of the natives. All through the centuries of the Middle Ages, Judaism competed with Christianity and Islam in the heart of North Africa for the souls of the peoples of the desert.

THE MARRANOS

A tragic era for the Jews of Spain began with the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula by the Christians. The Church Militant would brook no other religion. Roman Catholicism, at the zenith of its power, enforced a harsh policy against "Christ's enemies." The Papal Bull issued by Innocent the Third in 1199 marked the completion of a classic pattern of treatment that had been developing for eight and one-half centuries. It forbade Jews to build new synagogues, to associate with Christians, to attend them as physicians or to employ Christian nurses. Jews had to wear a distinctive badge on pain of suffering the infliction of ten lashes and were liable to the penalty of death and the confiscation of property for any attempt to make proselytes. Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Christian persecution of Muslims and Jews increased in intensity. Baptism by brute force, *autos-da-fé* for the unwilling, torture and exile became the lot of the Jews of Spain. For those who were willing to convert, all social and political doors opened and admission was won to the highest court circles. Indeed, history records that some of these *conversos* were so anxious to please that they became zealous supervisors of anti-Jewish Church policies, fulfilling the wishes of their masters with unmitigated vigor, approving and employing the most repressive measures. As members of the nobility and as High Churchmen, they became notorious for the thoroughness of their cruelty toward their former kinsmen.

The wickedness of the Church authorities reached its apex in the time and person of Thomas de Torquemada (1420-1498), spiritual confessor to Queen Isabella and inquisitor-general of Spain. In his day and under his supervision, the religious "Reign of Terror" known as the Inquisition reached a point where it was

without pity and without shame.

Especially tragic was the situation of the *Marranos*, those Jews who had publicly accepted Christianity but remained secretly loyal to their ancestral faith. The agents of the Inquisition kept all converted Jews under continual surveillance and regarded the slightest deviation from Roman Catholic practice as an indication of their persistence in their former faith. Manuals were composed for the guidance of these agents to facilitate their spying upon Jewish Christians, to observe whether they were in any way following Jewish customs or rituals. The most innocent acts often led to the torture chamber, the thumbscrew and the rack, and, in many cases, to the "purifying" fire of the auto-da-fé. Horror was heaped upon horror, reaching its tragic climax in the Expulsion from Spain and, subsequently, from Portugal.

In these circumstances, it is almost incredible and yet it is true that many of these Marranos not only remained faithful to Judaism but engaged in the extremely hazardous task of attempting to convert others to the religion for which they were suffering so much. Thus, about 1485, when King Joao the Second of Portugal sent large numbers of Marranos to the newly discovered island of Sao Thome on the west coast of Africa, they not only reverted to Judaism immediately and completely but also converted many Negro slaves and many native women whom they married. They sent many of the proselytes to their coreligionists in Morocco for instruction in their new faith. A similar development took place in the Canary Islands, where many Marranos sought refuge. Along with these Marranos went a number of "Old Christian" families who literally walked out of the Church and into the Synagogue. As soon as the Inquisition became aware of these happenings, it established branches on both Sao Thome and the Canary Islands and brutally stamped out these Judaizing heresies.

The existing records of Marrano martyrdom are very incomplete. In recent centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has tried desperately to tone down and even to obliterate the historical evidences of this medieval barbarism. But these bloody pages of ecclesiastical folly will continue, for many years to come, to testify

to the degradation and horror of unbridled religious fanaticism. The grim fires of the Inquisition will also serve to high-light the heroism of many brave men and women of the Middle Ages, Jews, Marranos, and born Christians, who defied all the power and machinery of Church and State in their devotion to the religion of Judaism and in their unremitting zeal to convert their fellows to the way of life which seemed to them to be the way of human dignity, mercy and truth. Their memory will be blessed as long as Judaism endures.

THE SUBBOTNIKI

In the last quarter of the fifteenth century, as the result of undercover Jewish missionary efforts, there arose in Russia a religious movement known as that of the *Subbotniki* or Sabbatarians. According to the Russian chroniclers, the originator of this Judaizing heresy was a learned Jew, *Skharia*, Zechariah, who had emigrated with a number of his coreligionists from Kiev to Novgorod. Profiting by the religious unrest prevalent at the time in Novgorod, Skharia got in touch with several discontented members of the Russian Orthodox clergy and succeeded in converting them to Judaism. Two leaders of the Novgorod Sabbatarians, ex-priests Denis and Alexius, went to Moscow in 1480 to preach the Sabbatarian doctrines. They won many followers for the movement. Some of these even submitted to the rite of circumcision. The heresy was soon deeply entrenched among the nobility of Moscow and in the court circles.

Archbishop Hennadius of Novgorod enlisted the aid of the secular authorities in fighting against the "Judaizing menace" and tried desperately to uproot it from his diocese. In Moscow the fight against the Sabbatarians was also long and difficult. It was finally checked by an edict of a Church council in 1504, supported by an order from the first Muscovite czar, Ivan the Third. The principle "Judaizers" were burned at the stake, while others were cast into prison or exiled to distant monasteries. As a result of this persecution by both church and state, the movement ceased to exist openly. However, it has continued to exist secretly from that

time to this. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was estimated that at least two million Russians were still clinging to the teachings of the Subbotniki. Writing in the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Rabbi Bernard Drachman stated, "Though nominally Christians, these Russian Sabbatarians are so close to Judaism in their faith and practices that they might almost be given the status of proselytes."

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM EXPULSION TO LIBERATION (1492-1789)

by

DAVID MAX EICHHORN

For the peoples of Western Europe, the Middle Ages ended with the dawn of the Renaissance. For the Jew, the darkness of the Middle Ages stretched on into the emancipating years that began with the French Revolution. The three centuries, from the exile of the Jews from Spain to the storming of the Bastille, continued the oppressive pattern of their predecessors. In the later medieval period, the Jews lived in the same sort of unpleasant social environment and were subjected to the same kind of hostile pressures that had marked and marred the earlier centuries. The enmity of the Church, persecution by local rulers, and the violence of the mob were almost as commonplace for the Jew of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as they had been in the more intellectually benighted earlier years. For the most part, Jews continued to live in fear of their Gentile neighbors, bewildered by the cruel and unjustifiable suffering they endured at the hands of the Christian and, as a result, generally full of well grounded suspicion and dislike for the non-Jews in whose midst they lived. Until the patterns of Jewish living in Europe were improved by the Era of Enlightenment, the rise of modern nationalism and the spread of political democracy, most Jews did not associate freely with Gentiles. It is, therefore, quite remarkable that, at every stage and in every land inhabited by Jews during all of the Middle Ages, the acquiring of proselytes never ceased.

Evidence of the high regard of the enlightened Jew for the

non-Jew who accepts membership in the Jewish faith and the Jewish people is found in a classical document written at the very beginning of the period which this chapter will discuss. In his commentary on the Torah, the much harassed and frequently exiled statesman and scholar, Don Isaac Abravanel (1437-1509), wrote the following

(Comment on Numbers 15:14-16) There are three reasons why the Bible makes converts and born Jews completely equal in the observance of all the commandments. Reason No. 1: Israel is a religious congregation, "one people in the world." . . . Reason No. 2: Our God is One and therefore it is incumbent upon those who believe in Him to form a perfect unity. . . . Reason No. 3: Our Torah sets down one pattern of life, one law; and all who obey its tenets must be regarded as equals.

(Comment on Deuteronomy 10:18-20) The orphan, the widow and the convert are singled out for special mention in this passage because they are weak and helpless and God has pity on them, even though He has no pity on sinners. . . . The intention of Scripture here is to state that the Jews should not depend on the merit of their fathers and not upon their being God's people; for God has more pity on one who has no father or on a convert who was not born as a member of His people than He has on a Jewish sinner. . . . You are commanded to walk in God's way. Therefore He commands you to love the convert; for you yourselves have known from the time of Egypt what it is to live among a people not your own.

As one reads between the lines in these passages, he is led to suspect that the lot of the convert to Judaism in this time was not a happy one, even in the very best of circumstances. There must have been many Jews in the time of Abravanel who did not believe that a convert and a born Jew were equal in either the sight of God or of man. One senses here the ambivalence which has been characteristic of the Jewish attitude toward converts and conversion from Biblical times down to the present: A keen desire on the part of the pious sage to bring the message of Judaism to all the world and a warm feeling for those who voluntarily and wholeheartedly enter the faith and, opposed to these, a widespread attitude of suspicion and discourtesy toward the convert on the part of the less well-informed and the less pious.

JUDAIZING HERESIES

The Catholic clergy of Poland and Lithuania, already deeply disturbed by the rising power of the Protestant Reformation and the spread of the Subbotniki heresy, described at the close of the last chapter, were moved to acts of violence and terror against the Jews of their countries by an incident that occurred in the city of Cracow in 1539.

A Catholic woman of Cracow, Catherine Zaleshovska, eighty years of age and the wife of a respected alderman, was accused of being a secret adherent of Judaism. The court which tried her for this heinous crime was headed by the Bishop of Cracow, Peter Gamrat, and was composed of the most learned priests of the diocese. When asked whether she believed in God, the aged woman replied: "I believe in God, Who created all that we see and do not see, Who cannot be comprehended by the human reason, Who pours forth His bounty over man and over all things in the universe." When asked if she believed in God's "only begotten son, Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost," the courageous old lady answered: "The Lord God has neither wife nor son, nor does He need them. For sons are needed by those who die, but God is eternal, and since He was not born, it is impossible that He should die. It is we whom He considers His sons, and His sons are all who walk in His paths." An observer who was present at the trial states, "When it was found impossible to detach her from her Jewish beliefs, it was decided to convict her of blasphemy. She was taken to the city jail, and a few days later she was burned. She went to her death without the slightest fear." Catherine Zaleshovska, eighty years of age, was burned at the stake in the market place of the city of Cracow. A contemporary chronicler wrote, "She went to her death as if it were a wedding."

This tragic incident gave rise to rumors that throughout Poland, and especially in the province of Cracow, many Christians were converting to Judaism. After being circumcised, so the story ran, these converts were being taken to Lithuania and there given shelter by the Jews of that country. The reigning monarch, Sig-

ismund the First, sent two commissioners to Lithuania to investigate the rumor. These commissioners brought back to the king a report that they could find no evidence of any such conversionist activity.

But the Polish-Lithuanian priestly hierarchy was still not satisfied. It brought another story to King Sigismund. This time the clergy charged that many of the Jews of Lithuania were about to migrate to Turkey, accompanied by Christians whom they had won over to Judaism. It was said that this movement was being carried out with the active cooperation of the Turkish Sultan and that a group of circumcised Christian parents and children had already been smuggled across the southern frontier into Moldavia. The Jews of Lithuania sent a deputation to the king, which assured him that the Jews of that country had no intention whatsoever of migrating to Turkey and that they had never tried to convert any Christians to Judaism. Once more the king of Poland had the charges investigated. Once more the findings were that the whole story was a figment of the priestly imagination. King Sigismund then gave the Jews of Lithuania a pledge, in the form of a special charter issued in 1540, that he would trouble them henceforth no more with any type of accusation unless it was founded on very substantial evidence.

Although the Lithuanian Jews denied that they had ever tried to make converts (what else would one expect them to do?), such was not the position taken by their Hungarian coreligionists in the situation which developed shortly thereafter in the country just to the south. In 1541, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent of Turkey conquered all that part of the world except the kingdom of Transylvania. Since Suleiman thought much more of Jews than he did of Christians, he had no objection whatsoever to the conversion of Hungarian Christians to Judaism. And he proceeded to treat the Hungarian Christians so badly and the Hungarian Jews so well that many Hungarian Christians became Jews in order to obtain the special privileges which were given only to Jews. These Lithuanian and Hungarian episodes provide excellent examples of the ways in which the reactions of both Christians

and Jews have varied according to the prevailing political winds. It is hardly likely that the traditional approaches of the sixteenth-century Lithuanian and Hungarian Jewish communities to the matter of conversion were so profoundly dissimilar that the one had no desire whatsoever to convert Christians to Judaism and the other welcomed them gladly, even when the motivation was not entirely spiritual.

Within the still independent enclave of Transylvania, a further development related to conversion to Judaism took place at about this same time. The Jewish and general populations of this nominally Christian state, completely surrounded by the forces of the Ottoman Empire, were a curious and heterogeneous mixture. Some of the Jews were *Ashkenazim*, north Europeans. Some were *Sephardim*, descendants of Spanish refugees. Some traced their ancestry back to the Khazars, the people of South Russia converted to Judaism in the eighth century. These Jews lived amid a Gentile population which was partly Catholic, partly Lutheran and partly Unitarian. For a time Transylvania, moved by the relatively tolerant point of view of its Turkish neighbors, became a land in which one could worship God according to the dictates of his individual conscience, a rare situation in sixteenth century Europe.

Encouraged by the liberal attitude of the Transylvanian rulers in religious matters, the Jews of the country began to propagate their faith openly. Many non-Jews became Jews. Many others, who accepted the main religious tenets of Judaism but who did not wish to identify themselves with the Jewish people, became Unitarians. One of these Unitarians, Andreas Eossi, chancellor of Transylvania from 1588 to 1623, started a new religious sect which, like its Russian counterpart, became known as the Sabbatarians. The Sabbatarians kept the dietary laws, observed Saturday as the Sabbath and celebrated a number of the major Jewish holy days. Eossi's successor in the chancellor's office was his adopted son, Simon Pechi, a brilliant and scholarly man. Pechi decided to complete the logical process of transformation from Catholic to Unitarian to Sabbatarian by becoming a Jew. So great was his zeal

for his new faith that he is said to have persuaded twenty thousand Transylvanian peasants to convert to Judaism. Prince Gabor Bethlen, in whose regime Eossi and Pechi effected these religious changes, was a very gentle monarch and an active member of the Sabbatarian sect. His successor, Prince George Rackoczi the Second, was neither of these. In his reign, the era of broad-mindedness came to an end, as did the Jewish missionary enterprise in Transylvania. Jewish rights and privileges were revoked. Simon Pechi was removed from the government and thrown into prison. He escaped and fled to Constantinople, where he became a compositor in the Jewish printing establishment founded by Donna Gracia Mendesia (c.1510-1568), Marrano aunt of Marrano statesman Don Joseph Nasi, Duke of Naxos. Pechi, a fine Hebraist, translated the *Siddur*, the daily prayer book, and other Jewish religious works from Hebrew into Hungarian.

Prince George's efforts to crush the Sabbatarian movement created a group of Transylvanian Marranos, who survived many efforts to crush them and, during more than three centuries, clung tenaciously to the precepts and practices of Judaism. Until 1691 Transylvania was an independent principality. From 1691 to 1868 it was a province of the kingdom of Austria. In 1868 it became part of Hungary and, for the first time since the days of Prince Gabor, its inhabitants were granted full religious freedom. In that year the Marrano existence of the Transylvanian crypto-Jews came to an end, and thousands of them publicly embraced Judaism. Chacham Moses Gaster, late Chief Rabbi of the Sephardic community of England, in his treatise *The Spread of Judaism Through the Ages*, states that in 1888 "I visited the center of these Jewish Sabbatarians in Bozod-Ujfalú, and there I had the privilege of meeting the old heroic martyr Kovachi, who, by sheer miracle, had survived the tortures inflicted upon her for the sake of her Jewish faith. Then already an old woman, she still bore the traces of that inquisition, and it was in her house, at early dawn, that I overheard in an adjacent room the Hebrew prayers recited by her grandson to his father."

THE SHULCHAN ARUCH

The student of any aspect of Jewish history in any given period must perforce look into the *halachic*, the legal literature of the time, to discover what light it sheds on the subject of his interest. This literature, the authoritative ecclesiastical law of the Synagogue, constitutes an unbroken stream of tradition stretching through almost all the recorded history of our people. It has its source and wellspring in the Bible. It continues to flow through the Mishna, a law code compiled at the end of the second century CE, and it reaches the proportions of a mighty river, touching the boundaries of every area of Jewish life, with the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, about 500 CE.

The application of Jewish law to the problems of life did not, however, cease with the completion of the Talmud. The halacha continued to grow and developed in three separate forms. In the first place, Talmudic material was expanded by means of commentaries, super commentaries and glosses. These additions added greatly to the sheer bulk of the material and, simultaneously, refined the discussion of each minute point of law. A second kind of development, dealing largely with new problems, is known as Responsa literature. This type of halachic writing consists of detailed replies by acknowledged rabbinic authorities to specific religious questions sent them by individuals or by communities. A third kind of development, of particularly important significance for our special field of inquiry, was the compiling of new Jewish law-codes by qualified scholars. As the other branches of halachic literature grew in bulk and complexity, it became increasingly necessary to make available to both the learned layman and the busy rabbi succinct digests of the latest legal decisions, systematically arranged by subject matter. The most widely accepted codes avoided lengthy hair-splitting argumentation and put little emphasis on the contradictory views of earlier individual sages. They gave instead the last word on the subject—the actual, practical legal decision accepted by the Jews of their time and place.

The earliest known post-Talmudic code dates from the eighth century. As code followed code, later authorities built upon the

work of their predecessors and, to a considerable extent, supplanted them. The code par excellence, authoritative almost from the time of its appearance to our own day, is the *Shulchan Aruch*, meaning "The Prepared Table." It was compiled by Rabbi Joseph Caro, who was born in Spain in 1488 and died in Safed in the Land of Israel in 1575. His code, first printed in Venice in 1565, tended to follow the traditions of the *Sephardic* or Mediterranean Jewish communities. On any moot point, he accepted the majority opinion of three earlier codifiers, Maimonides, Alfasi and Asheri. Since Maimonides and Alfasi were Sephardim and Asheri an *Ashkenazi* or north European, the split decisions were usually won by the Sephardic point of view. In 1578, there appeared an edition of the *Shulchan Aruch* together with what has become its standard commentary, the *Mappah* or "Tablecloth" for "the prepared table," by Rabbi Moses Isserles (1510-1572) of Cracow, Poland. Isserles represented the Ashkenazic tradition. Sephardic code and Ashkenazic commentary together reflected and tended to reconcile the opinions and practices that had developed in both of these sometimes divergent Jewish traditions. For that reason and also because of its intrinsic merit, the *Shulchan Aruch* won almost immediate and universal acceptance. As already indicated, the majority of present-day traditional Jews still regard the provisions of the *Shulchan Aruch* as being absolutely binding.

Therefore the regulations of the *Shulchan Aruch* which govern the manner of acceptance of proselytes are of even greater significance for this study than the painstaking recital of historic incidents of proselytizing. Names, dates and places relating to the conversion of non-Jews to Judaism in this and every other period of Jewish history, in their cumulative effect, do constitute a massive array of evidence to support the thesis that Jews have always desired and accepted sincere converts. Yet, with respect to any given locality in any given generation, one may argue: Perhaps these recorded incidents denote a sporadic, an unusual development. Perhaps Jewish law and the Jewish people never really tolerated the proselyte, save under exceptional circumstances. . . . In the face of the clear provisions of the *Shulchan Aruch*, such a conjec-

ture is inadmissible. This code cannot possibly be regarded as the theological speculation of some particularly tolerant individual rabbi. It is not homiletics; nor is it a collection of folk tales. It is a law code written in sober earnest. For the traditional Jewish community, it has been, for the past four hundred years, *the* Jewish law, the essence of Jewish living. The traditional Jew believes that only through proper study and understanding of the Shulchan Aruch may one comprehend properly the will and the way of God. We shall, therefore, examine carefully and in detail what the Shulchan Aruch has to say on the subject of proselytes.

THE SHULCHAN ARUCH ON PROSELYTES

We turn, then, to the legal provisions of the Shulchan Aruch with regard to gerim. While most of these provisions do not differ substantially from the majority opinions recorded in the Talmud, there are some significant changes and additions which were made in the post-Talmudic period. As we present the decisions of the Shulchan Aruch, the presumed source of the decision will be given wherever possible. Wherever the source given is not prefaced by the word *Talmud*, the reader will know that the conclusion reached by Joseph Caro is probably based on a post-Talmudic source.

The most important section dealing with converts in the Shulchan Aruch is chapter 268 of the *Yoreh Deah*, one of the four major subdivisions of the Shulchan Aruch. Even in relatively recent editions, this chapter bears a pathetic and revealing prefatory note which informs its reader that these regulations apply only in those places where the civil authorities permit Jews to accept converts.

Because this chapter is so important, it is quoted here practically in its entirety, together with the classical sources on which it is assumed each decision is based.

1. The first requirement for a male proselyte entering the Jewish fold is circumcision (Talmud Yebamot 46a). Even if he was previously circumcised or if he was born circumcised, it

is still necessary to draw a drop of blood of the covenant (Maimonides, *Hilchot Mila*, chap. 1).

2. When one presents himself as a candidate for conversion, he is asked: "What motivates you? Do you not know that, in these days, Jews are subject to persecution and discrimination, that they are hounded and troubled?" If he replies: "I know this and yet I regard myself as unworthy of being joined to them," he is accepted immediately (Talmud *Yebamot* 47a). The root-principles of our faith, i.e., the unity of God and the prohibition of idol-worship, are expounded to him at considerable length (Maimonides, *Hilchot Issurey Biah*, chap. 14). He is taught, too, some of the simpler and some of the more difficult commandments; and he is informed of the punishment involved in violating the commandments; for example: "Until now, if you did not observe the dietary laws, you were not subject to the punishment of being cut off from your people; if you violated the Sabbath, you were not subject to the punishment of stoning; but now you are subjecting yourself to the possibility of such punishment." This negative aspect is not explained at great length nor in detail. Moreover, just as he is informed of the punishments for violating the commandments, so too is he told of the rewards for observing them, particularly that by virtue of keeping the commandments, he will merit the life in the world to come (Talmud *Yebamot* 47a). He is told that no one is considered wholly righteous except those who understand and fulfill the commandments (Maimonides). He is also told: "Know that the world to come is intended only for the righteous. When you see Jews in distress in this world, their suffering is in reality future merit stored up for them in the world to come. Unlike the idolators, Jews do not receive the major portion of their reward here, lest they become puffed up with pride and go astray and lose their eternal reward. Nevertheless, the Holy One, blessed be He, does not overburden them with troubles that might cause them to perish. On the contrary, the idol-

atrous nations will perish but Israel will survive." This theme is expounded at considerable length so that the convert may properly appreciate the place of Israel in the Divine scheme (Talmud Yebamot 47a). If he finds these doctrines acceptable, he is circumcised immediately. After his circumcision is completely healed, he undergoes ritual immersion (Talmud Yebamot 47b). Three learned Jews stand by, while he is in the water, and instruct him a second time in some of the easy and some of the difficult commandments. In the case of a female proselyte, Jewish women accompany her and immerse her up to her neck. The three learned male Jews remain outside the baptismal chamber and give the convert instruction while she is in the water (Asheri). After the immersion, the convert is regarded as a full-fledged Jew. If he reverts to his former faith, he is treated as a Jewish apostate. If he marries a Jewess, the marriage remains valid even after his apostasy (Talmud Yebamot 47b).

3. The process involved in preparing a candidate for conversion—instruction, circumcision and immersion—requires the presence of a legal court of three learned Jews. The ceremony should be performed in the daytime (Talmud Yebamot 46b). However, if one is faced with a *fait accompli*, i.e., if the convert has been circumcised or immersed in the presence of only two bona fide witnesses or at night or if he or she underwent a ritual immersion as an act of purification but not for the specific purpose of thereby becoming a proselyte, the acts are valid and the convert is permitted to marry a Jew. Not all the authorities are in agreement on this. Alfasi and Maimonides maintain that, if the circumcision or immersion took place in the presence of only two witnesses or at night, marriage to a Jew is not permitted. However, if the marriage has already taken place and there are children from the marriage, the children are to be accorded full status within the Jewish community (Caro).

4. Since the immersion of a proselyte requires a Jewish court

of three men, the ceremony cannot be held on the Sabbath or a holy day or at night [because a Jewish court is not permitted to meet at these times] (Maimonides, *Hilchot Issurey Biah*); but, if a convert can prove that he was immersed in the presence of three Jews, his conversion is considered valid, no matter when the immersion ceremony was performed (Tosephot to *Yebamot* 46b).

5. One who circumcises a proselyte pronounces the blessing "Praised art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who hast sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to circumcise proselytes" (Talmud *Shabbat* 137b). In Israel, an additional blessing is said with regard to the drawing of the blood of the covenant for, were it not for the blood of the covenant, heaven and earth could not exist (Asheri).
6. If a pregnant woman is converted, the child born subsequently requires no immersion (Talmud *Yebamot* 78a).
7. A minor may be converted if his father gives consent. If he has no father and comes of his own accord or is brought by his mother, a Jewish court may convert him, because becoming Jewish is beneficial and it is permissible to confer a benefit on a minor without his consent. However, any minor so converted may, if he so desires, renounce the conversion after he attains maturity. Such a relapsed person is not considered an apostate but simply reassumes the status of a non-Jew (Talmud *Ketubot* 11a).
8. The ruling just cited applies to one who, after coming of age, does not live as an observant Jew. One who lives as an observant Jew after coming of age is not permitted to nullify his conversion (Talmud *Ketubot* 11a).
9. A Jew is not permitted to circumcise a non-Jew for health reasons alone but may do so only if the circumcision is for the purpose of conversion (Maimonides, *Hilchot Mila*). However, where the civil authorities permit Jews to give medical

services to non-Jews, the circumcision of non-Jews by Jews is permissible (Isserles). [Author's note—It is self-evident that the Islamic law which motivated the decision of Moses Maimonides in the twelfth century and the Polish law of the sixteenth century which guided the thinking of Moses Isserles took diametrically opposite positions on the question of the circumcision of non-Jews by Jews.]

10. A non-Jew who declares: "I was properly converted in such-and-such a Jewish court" may not join the Jewish community until his conversion is established by witnesses thereto (Talmud Yebamot 46a). However, if such persons are observed over a period of time to be living as faithful Jews and keeping all the commandments, these are regarded as converts, even though there be no witnesses to prove that they were ever formally converted. Nevertheless, if such an observant person wishes to marry a Jew, he must either bring positive proof of conversion or undergo ritual immersion for the specific purpose of conversion. There is also a strong opinion that one who comes and states that he is a non-Jew who has been converted properly is to be believed. Maimonides explained that, where the Jews are in the majority, the non-Jew who claims to be a convert is to be believed but, where the Jews are in the minority, the non-Jew is not to be allowed to marry a Jew unless he brings proof of conversion, because, in the latter instance, he is transferring from a less to a more favorable moral environment (Caro).
11. One who has been living for a long time in the Jewish community and who declares: "I was born as a non-Jew and I became a Jew simply by living a Jewish life and I consider both my children and myself to be Jews" is not considered to be a Jew but his children are considered to be Jews. He is not permitted to have sexual relations with a present or future Jewish wife until he has undergone ritual immersion (Talmud Yebamot 47a).
12. When the would-be proselyte presents himself, he should be

examined lest he be motivated to enter the congregation of Israel by hope of financial gain or social advantage or by fear. A man is examined lest his sole motive be to marry a Jewish woman and a woman is questioned lest she have similar desires toward some Jewish man (Maimonides). If no unethical motive is found, the candidate is told of the heaviness of the yoke of the Torah and how difficult it is for the average person to live up to the commandments of the Torah. This is done to give the candidate a chance to withdraw if he so desires. If the candidate goes through all this and is not dissuaded and it is apparent that his motives are of the best, he is accepted. However, if there is no investigation of motive or no instruction concerning the rewards and punishments attached to the commandments or if the candidate has been circumcised or immersed in the presence of three Jews unlearned in the Torah, the conversion is still a valid conversion, even if it is an established fact that the convert was motivated by an unworthy reason. Once a person is circumcised and ritually immersed, he is no longer a non-Jew, although he continues to be under suspicion until he proves by his righteous living that he is worthy of respect. Any such person who reverts to idolatry is considered to be an apostate Jew and any marriage which he has consummated with a Jewess is considered to be a valid Jewish marriage (Caro).

There are many other laws about gerim in the Shulchan Aruch. Some of them make strange reading. When examined cursorily, some seem to indicate contempt or even hatred for the convert. But the more closely one studies them, the more one realizes that the contempt and the hatred were not for the convert but for the non-Jewish world from which the convert had come. A thousand years of being driven from country to country, of being maligned, beaten, robbed, raped and murdered had taken their toll. The convert who voluntarily left this cruel, immoral outside world and came and asked to be admitted into the faith and the people of Israel received the boon which he desired. If he was whole-

hearted and sincere, he was not turned away. But to deny that the Jew of the Middle Ages looked at the surrounding hostile, menacing, Gentile world with anything but fear and contempt and hatred is to deny what is an all too plain truth. This attitude toward the outside world explains certain provisions of the Shulchan Aruch that otherwise would defy explanation.

Yoreh Deah 269:10 states that a convert has the legal status of a newborn child. Legally, he has neither parents, wife, children, brothers, sisters nor any other non-Jewish blood relatives. None of his deeds committed before conversion has any spiritual significance. All sins prior to conversion are forgiven and wiped out. Technically, a ger would be permitted to marry his own mother or sister, since he is now a new creature. Actually, he is not to be allowed to do so because this would be a spiritually unworthy act (*Yoreh Deah* 269:1). Similarly, the convert is forbidden to curse his father for his idolatry or to beat him or even to despise him in order that men should not say of the convert that he is a worse person now than he was before his conversion (*Yoreh Deah* 241:9).

The property of a deceased ger may be inherited only by his Jewish wife and children. If he dies and has no Jewish heir, his property becomes *hefker*, ownerless, and may be taken by the first person who comes along. His adult slaves must be given an opportunity to purchase their freedom but his minor slaves become the property of anyone who wants them (*Choshen Hamishpat*, chapter 275). Another passage, *Yoreh Deah* 267:65, states that when a ger dies and leaves no heirs, his adult slaves are immediately freed. If one has borrowed money from a ger and the ger dies, the Jew is not obligated to repay the loan to any children of the ger who were born before the conversion of their father (*Choshen Hamishpat* 127:2).

Because of the Jew's feeling that he was living amid nations with low moral standards, no female who was converted after reaching the age of three years and one day was technically considered to be a virgin (*Even Ha-ezer* 67:3). When a non-Jewish woman who is already married and still of childbearing age is

converted, she has to live apart from her husband for three months so that there may be no doubt whatsoever as to the Jewishness of any of her children conceived and born after the conversion (Even Ha-ezer 13:5).

There are a few instances in the Shulchan Aruch in which the convert is discriminated against solely because he is a convert. He is allowed to act as a judge in a civil case only in certain limited circumstances and he is never permitted to serve as judge in a criminal case. He is not allowed to lead the congregation in prayer if, in advance of the service, the congregation has decided that his doing so would place the Jewish community in an unfavorable position with the non-Jewish community. However, it is made very clear that, unless such a determination has been reached in advance of the service, the convert must be permitted to conduct the service. A person who has been converted properly may also lead in the grace after meals and is allowed to say the prayer "As Thou has caused *our* fathers to possess" for he is considered to be a child of Abraham, the founder of Judaism. In general, the position of the Shulchan Aruch with regard to converts is the same as that of the other Jewish classical writings: For almost every spiritual and practical purpose, a convert is in exactly the same position as every other Jew.

The Shulchan Aruch treats the matter of conversion to Judaism, then, in a straightforward, completely objective, almost matter-of-fact manner. It is taken for granted that there will be Gentile men and women who, for a variety of reasons, will desire admittance to the Jewish faith. Techniques are set forth through which they may attain that desire. There is no great emphasis on lengthy study or rigid test. There are no blanket prohibitions. There is a rather implicit acceptance of the fact that converts can, should and will come. There is, moreover, an underlying implication that it is right for non-Jews to want to become Jews and it is right for Jews to grant non-Jews the privilege of becoming Jews.

"SAINTS, HEROES AND MARTYRS"

The fidelity and courage with which the *Anusim*, better known

as Marranos, continued to cling to Judaism was mentioned in the previous chapter. These crypto-Jews, who were forced to profess allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church but continued to follow Jewish beliefs and practices in secret, not only returned to Judaism whenever they were given the opportunity but often succeeded in persuading Christians of non-Jewish ancestry to become believers in and worshippers of the One God.

Jewish religious law treated the returned Marranos with great understanding and leniency. They were not regarded as apostates but as individuals who had been forced to deny their religion by the cruelty of king and priest. One of the commentators on the Shulchan Aruch, Pischeh Teshuva to *Yoreh Deah* 268:12, quotes a Responsum which states that when uncircumcised Marranos come back to Judaism it is not necessary to give them any sort of advance instruction nor to try to discourage them in any way. They should be welcomed with kindness and with joy. They are to be circumcised but ritual immersion will not be required. Two blessings are to be recited over them, one the blessing for circumcision and the other "Blessed art Thou, O Lord . . . Who hast sanctified those who love thee." Also the following prayer is to be recited on behalf of the newcomer:

O God, grant success to this, Thy servant. Show him Thy kindness. Since he has returned to Thee in perfect repentance, do Thou, therefore, incline his heart to love and revere Thee. Open his heart to receive Thy Law. Lead him in the way of Thy commandments, that he may find favor in Thy sight. Amen.

The celebrated English Jewish historian, Cecil Roth, has written a whole book about Marrano "saints, heroes and martyrs." All that we may do here is to point to a few examples of Marrano missionary effort and of Christians who were led to Judaism by this effort.

Diogo da Assumpcao was born at Viana, Portugal, in 1579. He came from an old Christian family which had a tradition that, several generations before, a converted Jew had married into it. Diogo became a Franciscan monk. Because he believed himself to be partly of Jewish extraction, he took a keen interest in the

Old Testament. He was appalled by the fierceness with which the Jews were being persecuted in his day. Being convinced after much study that Judaism was the true religion and that Christianity was not, he determined to flee from Portugal and to make his way to some spot in the world where he could live openly as a Jew. Before he could leave Portugal, his secret was betrayed. He was arrested and thrown into jail. Brought before the Inquisition, he admitted proudly that he was a follower of the Law of Moses, "in which I have lived and wish to die and to which I look for salvation." For two years he was subjected to continual theological debate and to torture in a vain attempt to get him to recant. In prison, he fasted every Friday, as was the Marrano custom, lighted a candle at sundown on Friday evening, worked on Sunday and tried to the best of his meager knowledge and ability to observe the dietary laws. As he did these things, he knew the inevitable end to which they would lead. On August 3, 1603, at twenty-four years of age, Diogo da Assumpcao was burned alive in Lisbon "for the sanctification of God's name." The crypto-Jews of Portugal formed a fellowship in his honor known as "The Brotherhood of Saint Diogo" and they kept a candle burning perpetually before the Holy Ark in his memory. Here, and in many similar circumstances, the well-meaning but not so Jewishly well informed Marranos used Catholic symbolisms to express Jewish feelings and values.

Francisco Maldonado da Silva was a prominent surgeon of Portuguese Marrano extraction in Peru, South America. He became interested in Judaism through reading *Scrutinium Scripturarum*, Examination of the Scriptures, by Pablo de Santa Maria, Bishop of Burgos, Spain, a renegade Jew. The book, intended to demonstrate the falsity of Jewish doctrine, had exactly the opposite effect on da Silva. He circumcised himself with a pair of scissors, took the Biblical name of Eli and attempted to convert his sisters to Judaism. One of his sisters, an ardent Catholic, denounced her brother to the Inquisition. In 1627, he was arrested and taken to Lima for trial. The usual efforts were made by Catholic theologians to convince him that he was in error but without success.

On January 26, 1633, he was condemned to die for his heresy.

Six more years elapsed before the sentence was finally carried out. During all this time, da Silva practiced Judaism with fanatical zeal. During the week of Yom Kippur, he fasted four days instead of one as penance for his sins. He took the vows of a Nazarite, let his hair grow long and would not touch any meat. He signed himself as "Eli Nazareno, alias da Silva, unworthy servant of God." On one occasion he managed to get through the window of his cell. Instead of attempting to escape, he visited the Christian prisoners in the neighboring cells, urging them to convert to Judaism. On scraps of paper, with ink made from charcoal and with pens cut out of a chicken bone with a knife constructed from a nail, he wrote more than two hundred pages of essays setting forth his religious ideas. Together with six other unrepentant Marranos, he was burned alive in an auto-da-fé at Lima, Peru, January 23, 1639. As the sentences were being read to the doomed martyrs, a sudden high wind tore away the canopy that covered part of the courtyard in which the executions were taking place. "This is the doing of the Lord God of Israel," he cried out, "so that now at last I may look upon Him face to face."

Don Lope de Vera was a Spanish nobleman who lived in San Clemente, not far from Cuenca. He was an Old Christian, i.e., his ancestry was of unquestioned *limpieza*, purity, i.e., he had not one drop of Jewish blood in his veins. Having studied Hebrew diligently at the University of Salamanca, he became convinced that Judaism had the truth and that all other religions were false. He attempted to "Judaize" his brother, who promptly handed him over to the Inquisition. He was arrested, on June 24, 1639, and was kept in jail for five years during which the Catholic theologians went through their customary routine but to no avail. In his cell, de Vera circumcised himself with a sharp bone, changed his name to Judah, refused to answer to any other name and abstained from eating all meat. He refused to argue with the eminent Catholic clergy who were sent to convince him that he was a sinner. All their lengthy adjurations were answered with the single statement: "*Viva la ley de Moisés!*" which means "Long live the Law

of Moses!" Don Lope de Vera was burned alive, at the age of twenty-five, in Valladolid, Spain, on June 25, 1644. As he was being led to his death through the streets of the city, he recited the *Viddui*, the Hebrew confessional prayer of the dying. From the midst of the flames, almost with his last breath, he repeated the words of the Psalmist: "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, in Thee have I trusted; let me not be found lacking in faith; let not my enemies triumph over me."

We have had our share of "saints, heroes and martyrs." May we so live as to show ourselves worthy of them.

During this period there were many Christians in northern Europe, entirely removed from Marrano influence and example, who converted to Judaism—sometimes in spite of the vigorous opposition of the Jewish religious authorities to whom they presented themselves. There was, for example, Conrad Victor, a professor of classical languages at the University of Marburg in the province of Hesse, Germany. In 1607, in order to become a Jew, he migrated to Salonica, Greece, leaving his wife and family behind in Germany. He converted in Salonica and took the name of Moses Prado. Seven years later, he asked the Duke of Hesse for permission to return to his family. The request was refused. Moses Prado the Jew, who had once been Herr Professor Conrad Victor of the University of Marburg, died in exile and never saw his wife or family again.

And there was Nicholas Antoine, born about 1602 in Briey, Lorraine. His parents were Roman Catholic peasants. Antoine studied in Catholic colleges. Repelled by the excessive theological zeal of his teachers, he left Roman Catholicism and studied for the Protestant ministry at Sedan, France, and Geneva, Switzerland. Early in his ministry he became attracted to Judaism. He asked the rabbis of Metz to convert him and was refused. He then went to Italy, to the rabbis of Venice, and was rebuffed again. A female convert, "Esther, daughter of Abraham our father," had recently been burned at the stake in Venice and the rabbis were afraid to stick out their spiritual and physical necks. They advised the young minister to try his luck in Padua. The rabbis of Padua

also said "no." They advised Antoine to remain a Christian and to practice Judaism in secret. Disappointed, Antoine returned to Switzerland.

Publicly, he was the Protestant pastor of Divonne, a village in the district of Gex. Privately, he was a Jew. He observed *kashrut*, the dietary laws, in his home and recited his daily prayers in Hebrew. In public worship, he avoided the mention of Jesus whenever possible and preached exclusively from the Old Testament. He read the Apostle's Creed in a mumbling undertone. When he gave Holy Communion to his congregants, he substituted the words "Your Redeemer remembers you" for the traditional and expected: "This is my body; this is my blood." He finally aroused the ire of the Lord of the Manor one Sunday when he preached on the Hebrew words in Psalm 2:12 *Nashku bar* which Christians have translated erroneously as "Kiss the son" and have maintained is a reference to Jesus. Antoine stated most emphatically that not only is this translation incorrect but that, at all events, God does not have a Son. He was arrested for heresy, taken to Geneva and turned over to the Swiss Protestant equivalent of the Inquisition.

Antoine now openly declared that he considered himself a Jew and not a Christian. At first this resulted in the charge being changed from heresy to lunacy but, when Antoine adhered steadfastly to his declaration, the charge was changed back to heresy. The trial began on April 11, 1632. The Swiss Protestant pastors did their very best under the circumstances. Some argued that he had never tried to convert other Protestants to Judaism. Others said he should be merely cast out of the ministry and banished. But still others maintained that such mild treatment would encourage the growth of heresy. The latter judgment prevailed. On April 20, Antoine was condemned to die by strangulation and then to have his body burned at the stake. The sentence was carried out the same day. Antoine never wavered for an instant. He went to his death repeating over and over, "I die for the glory of the great God of Israel, Who is One and without compare." When one of the pastors present at the execution tried to console Antoine by mentioning the Trinity, the already gagged Antoine showed

both his disgust and disbelief by kicking violently at the wood that was heaped around him.

There were no Jews in Geneva at this time and it is quite likely that Antoine's martyrdom was completely unknown to the Jews of that period. The whole story came to light only comparatively recently as a result of the research of Cecil Roth.

* * * *

What were the Jewish classical scholars of this day writing about converts and conversion? Let us take a brief look at a few of their statements dealing with the subject.

Over the entrance of the residence of MAHARSHAW, Rabbi Samuel Eliezer Edels (1555-1631), Talmudic commentator of Ostrog, Poland, was written the following Biblical verse: "The ger did not lodge in the street; my doors I opened to the roadside" (Job 31:32). What Maharshaw may have meant by this may be gathered from his comment on Pesachim 87b:

If God had so desired, He could have punished Israel for its sins in many different ways; but He selected the method of exile in order that Israel might make converts, in order that Israel might bring the true faith to nations steeped in idolatry.

Or, perhaps, from his comment on Yebamot 47:

The reason that one begins to explain Judaism to the convert by telling him about the tithes reserved for the poor is that, if the Jews ever regain possession of the Land of Israel, the land will be divided among the tribes and none will be allotted specifically to gerim. Therefore, the convert needs to be assured that, under all circumstances, provision will be made for his wants. At the present time, this particular point has little meaning. The present practical effect of bringing these facts to the attention of the convert is to emphasize to him the importance which Judaism places on attending to the wants of the poor.

Leo da Modena (1571-1648), of Venice, Italy, was a brilliant poet and writer, a forerunner of the modern scientifically minded scholar. Commenting on the strange Talmudic statement of Rabbi Chelbo that "proselytes are as troublesome to Israel as the plague," Leo of Modena wrote:

In former times, Israel was not anxious to make converts because of

its desire, as a people, to keep to itself. It was in that kind of atmosphere that a convert became as difficult for the people to handle as a leper. It was in that kind of atmosphere that the convert was compelled to give full proof of his sincerity.

The implications quite clearly are that there has been a change of atmosphere, that Leo of Modena does not agree with Rabbi Chelbo, that Israel no longer wishes "to keep to itself" and that would-be converts are not interrogated as closely in seventeenth century Venice as they were in earlier times and places.

* * * *

"OH, WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN . . . I"

The more the trials and tribulations of the Jews increased, the more fervid became their hope and the more fixed their assurance that these trials and tribulations were but the signs and portents predicted by the prophet Daniel, the time of persecution and suffering that was to precede the coming of the Messiah, the thousand-year era of peace, the great Day of Judgment. This fever which possessed the very heart and soul of a desperate, afflicted people can only be understood in our day by those who listen with sympathy and with empathy to the songs which have welled forth from the heart and the soul of the American Negro. The Jew listens and understands and is moved deeply because there are still within his own heart and soul vestigial remnants of a similar fire which burned ever so fiercely three hundred years ago.

The fever reached its height in the lifetime and through the person of Sabbatai Zevi, Kabbalist and pseudo-Messiah, who was born in Turkey in 1626 and died in Albania in 1676. The Kabbalists had figured out from the Zohar that the Messiah would make his appearance in 1648. Christian scholars had calculated from the New Testament Book of Revelation that Jesus would come again in 1666. To satisfy both the Jews and Christians, Sabbatai first declared himself to be the Messiah in 1648 but claimed that the final proofs of his Messiahship would be delayed until 1666. As 1666 approached, the Jewish world was in ferment. Ringing declarations were published throughout the world by the

Sabbatians that the Great Day was at hand. Prophets and prophetesses in many lands, speaking in unknown tongues, prophesied, sang, danced, writhed on the floors of the synagogues. Sabbatai Zevi boldly divided up the world among twenty-six of his followers. Came 1666 and nothing miraculous happened. The Turks arrested Sabbatai for stirring up revolutionary thoughts among the people. To save his life, he became a Muslim. Thus ended the Messianic career of Sabbatai Zevi. But the Sabbatian fever did not subside completely for many years thereafter.

One of those who was caught up in this whirling Messianic storm was the Dutch Marrano author and scholar, Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel (1604-1657). A profound believer in the *Kabbalah*, the "science" of mystical speculation, Manasseh was one of those who thought that the Messiah would not come until the Jews were scattered to "the four corners of the earth" mentioned in the Bible. When Manasseh heard from a traveller to the Dutch colonies in South America that evidence had been found that the American Indians were remnants of the Lost Ten Tribes, his heart leaped with joy. This was a sure sign that the Jews were in every corner of the earth. The Messianic period must be close at hand. There was only one country in the whole world which had no Jews, or so Manasseh believed. This country was England, from which the Jews had been expelled in 1290. Until England permitted the Jews to return, the coming of the Messiah would be delayed. Therefore, in the closing years of his life, Manasseh ben Israel made a desperate effort to persuade Oliver Cromwell and the English Parliament to permit the Jews to come back to England.

When Manasseh came to plead with Oliver Cromwell for the readmission of the Jews, the Lord Protector stated to him that the chief objections to the Jews were based on charges often made against them. These were: 1) that Jews use the blood of Christian children in the making of Passover *matsot*, unleavened bread; 2) that, through their usury, they impoverish every country in which they dwell; and 3) that they endeavor continually to convert non-Jews to Judaism. Cromwell's concern over the proselytizing tendencies of the Jews may have been engendered by the fact

that a number of his fellow-Puritans had carried their contempt for the New Testament and their devotion to the Old Testament to a most logical conclusion; they left England, went to Holland and converted to Judaism. Replying to Cromwell's statement, Manasseh insisted that the first charge was completely false, that the second charge could be averted if Jews were given easy access to all trades and professions and that the third charge was also without foundation. As a matter of fact, said he, to seek overtly to convert non-Jews is completely contrary to the basic principles of Judaism. He knew better, of course. At any rate, he made a promise, on behalf of world Jewry, that, if the Jews came back to England, they would never, never try to persuade a non-Jewish Englishman to become a Jew.

To this day, most of the rabbis of the British Empire take the promise given to Cromwell by Manasseh ben Israel very, very seriously—so seriously that more rabbinical stumbling blocks are placed in the path of would-be converts to Judaism in Great Britain and South Africa than almost anywhere else on earth. And, typical Englishmen that they are, these rabbis take great pride in their obduracy. The recent Chief Rabbis, without exception, have not hesitated to boast of the difficulty put into the way of a British non-Jew who wants to become a Jew, while, at the same time, they bemoan with equal emphasis the large number of British Jews who are lost to Christianity. It is not likely that Manasseh ben Israel would be very pleased with the present attitude of the British rabbinate. As a political realist, he was quite ready to promise Oliver Cromwell in 1655 that the Jews would not attempt to convert the English. As an ardent Messianist, he knew that the promise was meaningless because an era would soon dawn in which the glory and might of the God of Israel would be revealed in such majesty and splendor that the whole world, including the English components thereof, would turn to Judaism. What makes us sure of this? First of all, Manasseh's own writings. Second, the city of Amsterdam, where Manasseh lived and where he was the outstanding leader of the large Jewish community, was a hotbed of Jewish conversionist activity. Mar-

ranos and non-Jews who wished to live as Jews were streaming into Amsterdam from every part of Europe. In 1633, the philosopher and freethinker Uriel Acosta (1585-1640), was finally and completely excommunicated from the Amsterdam Jewish community after many years of bitter wrangling. The basic charge which led to Acosta's trial and excommunication was that he had sought to dissuade three Christians from becoming Jewish proselytes. Is it possible to imagine, with this sort of factual historical background, that Manasseh ben Israel really believed that overt endeavors to convert non-Jews to Judaism were contrary to the basic principles of Judaism?

In the long line of converts that passed through Amsterdam in the course of the latter Middle Ages, the following deserve special mention:

Moses ben Abraham Avinu Haas. Born in Nikolsberg, Hungary. Converted in Amsterdam about 1686 or 1687. Married daughter of one of rabbis of city. Became proficient in both Hebrew and Yiddish. Printed many books in both languages. Started wandering through Europe about 1694. Opened publishing houses in Germany successively in Berlin, Dessau, Halle, Frankfort an der Oder. Controversial figure. Published Hebrew translation of New Testament and was greatly opposed to Kabbala. This strange combination of activities made him suspect with many of his Jewish contemporaries.

Johann Peter Spaeth, 1640-1701. Born in Vienna of Catholic parentage. Father a shoemaker. Family moved to Augsburg, Germany, between 1642 and 1645. After being educated by the Jesuits, began to earn living as private tutor. Dissatisfied with Catholicism, became Lutheran. Went to Strassbourg, Alsace, and prepared for ministry. Became Lutheran pastor in Frankfurt-am-Main and then a teacher of religion at Saalhof. Renounced Lutheranism and was received back into Catholicism in Frankfurt in 1683. Still dissatisfied. Resolved to leave both Germany and Christianity. Went to Amsterdam and was converted to Judaism. Took Hebrew name of Moses. Was known among Amsterdam Jews as *Moses Germanus*, Moses the German. Wrote books defending Juda-

ism. Attacked the unorthodox philosophic teachings of Spinoza.

Israel ben Abraham Avinu, also known as *Yisrael Ger*, Israel the Convert. Originally a Catholic monk. Converted in Amsterdam. Composed Jewish apologia and attacks on Christianity. Like Moses ben Abraham, he established printing presses in Germany, in Koethen, Jessnitz and Wandsbeck. Published *Midrash Rabba* to Genesis and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*. Close friend of Rabbi David Fraenkel, teacher of Moses Mendelssohn in Dessau. Was in printing business in Germany from about 1717 to 1740. Succeeded in printing business by his sons Abraham and Tobias.

Aaron Moses Isaac Graanboom, 1736-1807. Born in Linköping, Sweden, "at a time when Jews were all but unknown in that country." His father, a Swedish nobleman, decided at age of sixty-nine to convert to Judaism. Took his wife, fourteen-year-old daughter and twelve-year-old Aaron to Amsterdam and there the whole family was converted. Aaron Graanboom was given a *yeshiva* education and developed such proficiency in Talmud that he was named *Rosh Yeshiva*, headmaster, of the *Yeshivat Ets Chaim* school and one of the *dayyanim*, judges, of the Amsterdam Jewish community. When the liberal congregation *Adat Jeshurun* was established in 1797, Graanboom served as its first rabbi until his death in 1807. He was succeeded as rabbi by his son, Israel Graanboom.

IN THE NEW WORLD

During the centuries we are now considering, a New World was developing on the American continent. Here, too, the fascination which Judaism has always exerted upon the minds of some intelligent non-Jews, sincere seekers after religious truth, was operative from the very earliest days of American settlement.

In sixteenth and seventeenth century Latin America, the continued sadism of the Spanish Inquisition and the suffering of the Marranos were very much in evidence. Many Marranos from Spain and Portugal found their way to Spanish America and, in their new home, attempted to revert to their ancestral faith. The Church attempted to stamp out these "Judaizing" backslidings.

At first, those accused of this crime were sent back to the old country for trial and punishment. In 1528, the first New World auto-da-fé was held in Mexico and two Judaizers were burned. Similar Inquisitorial torments soon became an accepted feature of colonial life all through Central and South America and in such far-flung Spanish colonies as the Philippine Islands. The case of Francisco Maldonado da Silva, the Marrano who tried to convert his fellow prisoners and who was executed in Lima, Peru, in 1639, has already been described. As late as 1788 a Mexican Catholic priest, Raphael Gil Rodriguez, was convicted of being a Judaizer and sentenced to be burned. At the last moment, however, he professed repentance so instead of being "relaxed," i.e., turned over to the secular authorities for execution, so that the Church could maintain technically that it was not responsible for the carrying out of the death sentence, he was "reconciled," i.e., he got off much easier with a sentence that might have ranged from a prescribed act of penance to a jail term up to and including life imprisonment.

There was one striking exception to the New World persecution of Marranos. The Dutch government invited both Jews and Marranos to help colonize the lands which it controlled in the Americas. Many Marranos from Europe and some from Latin American countries, as well as thousands of Dutch Jews, accepted the invitation. They settled chiefly in the West Indies and along the northern coast of South America. Of particular interest to this study is the fact that these Jews were given full freedom of religion and full opportunity to proselytize. That the Jews took advantage of the opportunity and that they converted their Negro slaves to Judaism in sizable numbers is shown from the 1791 census figures for the Jewish community of Paramaribo, Surinam (Dutch Guiana): Sephardim (South Europeans and North Africans), 834; Ashkenazim (North Europeans), 477; Mulattoes, 100. Even though most of these slaves were probably converted involuntarily, numbers of their descendants have continued to be faithful adherents to Judaism to the present day. Many a Jewish tourist in the Caribbean area has been amazed to see the Negro

porter or maid in his hotel wearing a Star of David and, upon inquiry, has been told, simply and proudly. "I, too, am a Jew." The growing Negro congregations in Harlem are made up in part of colored Jews who have migrated from the West Indies and South America to New York City.

The strangest story of Jewish proselytization in American Jewish history has to do with a curious happening that occurred so quietly during the colonial era that many are inclined to regard it as being more legend than fact. That all the facts are not known is clear; that some of the facts may have been exaggerated by enthusiastic local historians is very possible; but that the story is completely or even largely legendary is not very likely.

The time was approximately 1720 to 1745 and the place was a locality in the section of southeastern Pennsylvania where dwell that wonderfully unique collection of religious eccentrics known as the "Pennsylvania Dutch."

Early in the 18th century, some Welsh Seventh-Day Baptists settled down in Lancaster County alongside some German Baptists. The Welsh Baptists persuaded the German Baptists that it was unscriptural to eat pork and that it was scriptural to observe Saturday as the Sabbath. About this same time a number of Jews, whose business it was to trade with the Indians, moved into the neighborhood and, since these Jews were also Saturday-Sabbath observers and pork-eschewers, the Seventh-Day Baptists and the Jews felt that they had very much in common. Whether or not any sizable number of these Seventh-Day Baptists converted to Judaism in the fullest sense is a question on which there is no unanimity among historians but the following facts are quite definitely established.

From 1720 until about 1745 the Jewish traders and their "proselytes" (so they are styled in the history books of the Pennsylvania Dutch sects) formed a religious community in Heidelberg township (then in Lancaster County but now in Lebanon County), about twenty miles north of Lancaster, at a spot now occupied by Schaefferstown. Here a synagogue was built "on the old Indian trail leading from the Conestoga to the Swatara creeks." It was

a "rude log house, known as 'the Schul.'" Next to the *Schul* (German term for synagogue) stood a log cabin, reputed to have been the home of the *chazzan* or leader of the congregation. The congregation established a cemetery about 1732, which was surrounded by a stone wall. The cemetery, intact with tombstones and stone wall, still existed in 1885. Sometime between 1885 and 1901, it was destroyed and ploughed over. The old log cabin in which the congregational leader is said to have lived was still standing in 1926 but has since been torn down.

About 1743, a group of new German immigrants arrived on the scene to found the town of Schaefferstown. They were very hostile to the Jews and their "proselytes." A. S. Brendle, in his history of Schaefferstown, written in 1901, states:

The Jews remained here for some time after the arrival of the Europeans, but they gradually grew less in numbers and finally disappeared altogether. Their synagogue was in ruins long before the last of the race left the neighborhood and their graveyard here has also ceased to exist.

There is no longer any physical trace in Schaefferstown, Pennsylvania, of the existence of "the first synagogue in the American desert." But to this day there are, in that neighborhood, Pennsylvania Dutch (or, more properly, Pennsylvania German—for they are of German and not of Dutch extraction) individuals who observe Saturday as their Sabbath, do not eat pork and do not mix milk dishes with meat dishes. Perhaps the German Seventh-Day Baptists of Heidelberg township actually became Jews. Perhaps they did not go the whole way but merely "Judaized." In either case, their influence has not entirely dissappeared. The writer of this chapter, who was born and reared in Lancaster County, remembers being told by the bearded Pennsylvania Dutchman who brought his mother her weekly butter and eggs, "I am a more observant Jew than you. I keep your Sabbath. I keep your dietary laws. I do not shave. This has been the way of my family for hundreds of years."

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Jacob ben Joseph Reischer, a Talmudic scholar who lived in

France in the early part of the eighteenth century and wrote the commentary *Iyun Yaakov* on the Talmudic compendium known as *Ein Yaakov* has the following comment on Yebamot 48b:

The text states: "Why are the proselytes in our day afflicted and suffering? Rabbi Chananya ben Rabban Gamliel says: Because some of them do not observe even the seven commandments which are to be observed by the righteous non-Jew. Rabbi Jose says: Because some of them are not as familiar with the commandments as are born Jews. Abba Chanan says: Because some of them worship God not out of love but out of fear. Others say: Because it took some of them too long to decide to become Jews."

The text refers to an historical period when Israel was at the height of its power and glory, during which time proselytes were afflicted in order to test them. For example, Job was tested by Satan in order to find out if his conversion to Judaism was genuine. But now, when Israel is in exile, who can question the sincerity of anyone who wants to become a Jew? Any afflictions which are undergone now by a proselyte must be smittings of love. However, if the affliction which comes to him is of a type which causes him to cease from prayer and from study of Torah, then we know that it is not a smiting of love but a smiting which comes because of sin.

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CAPTAIN ALEXANDER VOZNITZIN

The lot of the Jews in Russia was rarely a happy one. The priests instilled in the minds of both princes and people the concept that the Jews were the eternal enemies of Christianity and the Christians.

For the greater part of the reign of Peter the Great, 1682-1725, almost the entire Russian Empire was *Juden-rein*. There was a small Jewish community in the district of Smolensk on the Polish border. These Jews earned their living by serving as tax collectors and customs collectors for the nobles. One of the prominent Jewish tax-farmers, as they were called, was Baruch Leibov, who had the temerity to finance the building of a synagogue in his village of Zverovich. This antagonized the local Greek Orthodox priest who charged that the building of the synagogue was but the first step in a Jewish master plan to convert the community to Judaism. His protests were so effective that Peter's successor,

Empress Catherine the First, issued an ukase in March, 1727, that Baruch and his fellow-Jews were no longer to be allowed to collect taxes and were "to be deported immediately from the territory of Russia." They were to be allowed back into Russia only periodically as visitors, for the purpose of exhibiting and selling merchandise at Russian fairs and for similar business ventures.

In 1738 an event occurred which resulted in all Jews, except those who were willing to convert to Greek Catholicism, being barred permanently and completely from Russia. This prohibition continued in force until after the first partition of Poland in 1772.

The event in question was brought about by the proselytizing activities of the previously mentioned Baruch Leibov. After his expulsion, Leibov continued to visit Russia on matters of business. On one of his visits to Moscow, he became acquainted with Alexander Voznitzin, a retired captain of the Russian Navy. Voznitzin was an ardent student of the Bible. He asked Leibov to teach him Hebrew and to explain Judaism to him. From there matters proceeded apace to a day early in the year 1738 when Voznitzin's wife denounced her husband to the authorities as one who had embraced Judaism. She named Leibov as her husband's "seducer." The police raided Voznitzin's house and found very incriminating evidence, "a small garment with fringes on the four corners" and a Russian psalter from which the pictures of Jesus and the saints had been ripped out. Voznitzin and Leibov were arrested.

Further evidence which came out at the trial: In 1736 Voznitzin and Leibov made a trip together. In the course of this trip, they stopped at a farmhouse on Friday evening and did not leave until Saturday evening; during that day Voznitzin sat with his head covered and read a book; they were unwilling to eat anything the farmer had to serve except bread and honey. After the Sabbath, they proceeded to a town on the Polish border, where Leibov's son lived. Here Voznitzin was circumcised and converted. When Voznitzin returned from this trip, he collected all the holy ikons on his estate and threw them into the nearest river. He instructed his servants that henceforth they were to say their confessions only to God and not to the priests.

The trial of the criminals began in St. Petersburg on March 22, 1738, before the Chancellery for Secret Inquisitorial Affairs. The two men confessed, under torture, to all the crimes set forth in the preceding paragraphs. Czarina Anna, the reigning monarch, was horrified. She ordered that these vile creatures be gotten out of the way as quickly as possible and declared

Seeing that Voznitzin and Baruch Leibov have confessed, the first to profaning the name of Christ, falling away from the true Christian faith, and accepting the Jewish religion, and the other that by his misleading words he enticed him to Judaism, there is no further need for a hearing. In order that the disgraceful, blasphemous matter should not be prolonged any further, and that those who, like the blasphemer Voznitzin and the misleader Baruch, shall never again dare entice any others, both should be punished for their crime against God with death by burning so that, seeing them suffer, ignorant people and God-blasphemers shall not turn away from the Christian law, and seducers, like Baruch, shall not dare lead them astray from their Christian faith and convert them to their own.

The auto-da-fé took place in the public square of St. Petersburg, before a large crowd of spectators, on Saturday, July 15, 1738, at eight o'clock in the morning. When the two men were tied to the stake, Leibov was so calm and so ready for martyrdom that Voznitzin is reported to have turned to him and have said, "*Baruch, nye toropis*, do not be in such a hurry."

For putting her loyalty to the Church above her regard for her husband, Voznitzin's wife was rewarded greatly. The government gave her a piece of property encompassing the sharecropping holdings of one hundred peasants, in addition, of course, to the estate of her deceased criminal husband.

COUNT VALENTIN POTOCKI

Count Valentin Potocki, scion of a rich and noble Lithuanian family, was sent to Paris to complete his education. There he became acquainted with a young Polish student, Zaremba, who also came from an aristocratic family. One day they went into a tavern to have a drink. In the yard of the tavern, an old man was sitting and reading to a little boy in a strange language out of a strange-looking book. When the young Poles asked the old man the

name and nature of the book, he told them that he was reading from the Bible in the original Hebrew. The youths asked him to instruct them in Hebrew and in the principles of Judaism. He did this so successfully that both Potocki and Zaremba decided to become Jews. As a matter of fact, the friends made a pact with each other to convert to Judaism and settle in the Holy Land.

Potocki wanted to make sure that he was doing the right thing, so he went to Rome and there he made an intensive study of the religion into which he had been born, Roman Catholicism. These studies only deepened his conviction that, for him, Judaism held the truth and Catholicism did not. He went to Amsterdam, became a Jew and took the name of Abraham ben Abraham.

Zaremba, after waiting some time for his friend to return to Paris, decided to give up the idea of changing his religion. He returned to Poland, married and entered the gay social world of the Polish nobility of his day. But his conscience bothered him. Although he was not certain whether or not Valentin had kept his word, Zaremba was hounded night and day by the thought that not only had he failed to live up to his end of the agreement but he was also sacrificing his intellectual and spiritual integrity for an inherited mess of pottage. His health began to fail. On the advice of his physician, he left with his wife and son for Western Europe, for what his wife thought was to be merely a short vacation. Once beyond the Polish border, Zaremba confided to his wife the cause of his malaise. Moved by love for her husband, she consented to go with him to Amsterdam so that he might be circumcised and converted. Shortly after their arrival in that city, both father and son were formally converted to Judaism. Some time later, Zaremba's wife, touched by the piety of her husband and child, also decided to convert. The family then went to the Holy Land where they lived out their lives as faithful servants of the Holy One. Prince Zaremba fulfilled his promise to his friend Valentin and to God.

In the meantime, Valentin had also left Amsterdam and gone to the Holy Land. But he did not stay there long. Homesickness brought him back to Lithuania, to Ilya, a little town near Vilna.

There he spent all his time in the synagogue studying Torah. He was looked upon by the Jews of the town with a love approaching awe. "Such a remarkable *ger tsedek*!" They never revealed to any non-Jew, of course, that their *Reb Avraham* was a convert. One day a little boy was misbehaving in the synagogue. Reb Avraham slapped him and told him to stop behaving like a *shegetz* (an uncomplimentary Yiddish word for "non-Jew"). The boy's father, in anger, turned informer and told the local police that Reb Avraham was in reality a Christian apostate.

Valentin was arrested and taken to Vilna. Despite all manner of torture, he refused to renounce his Jewish beliefs. On the second day of *Shevuot*, May 24, 1749, he was burned alive in the city square of Vilna. No Jew was present save a beardless youth, Zishko, who was not recognized by the crowd as a Jew. Zishko reported that Reb Avraham died heroically and that his last words were the Hebrew benediction, "Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, Who hast given me this opportunity to sanctify Thy Name before many." Count Valentin Potocki, too, had fulfilled his promise.

After the execution, Valentin's ashes were stolen from the pyre and buried in the Jewish cemetery. A huge tree grew over his grave. This tree was regarded by the Jewish community of Vilna with great reverence and many Jews would make pilgrimage to it to do honor to the martyr whose memory it preserved. A few years before the Second World War, the tree was cut down by anti-Jewish vandals.

Although the story of Count Potocki was carried down from generation to generation in the Jewish community of Vilna and although his grave had an honored place in the Jewish cemetery of that city, many historians have been inclined to believe that at least parts of the story are legendary, because no mention is made of the martyr in the contemporary Jewish archives or writings. For the Jews of Lithuania and Poland, the first half of the eighteenth century was a period of rigorous censorship, ritual murder trials, repeated and bloody pogroms and frequent expulsions. It was not a propitious time for a Jewish archivist or scholar to make mention

of the fidelity to Judaism of one who had begun life as a Roman Catholic Lithuanian nobleman.

LORD GEORGE GORDON

As has been mentioned, there has been a great reluctance in the English Jewish community to accept converts, ostensibly because of the promise made by Manasseh ben Israel to Oliver Cromwell. In 1751, a few Christians came to London from Norway and asked admittance into the Jewish fold. Not only did the wardens of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue refuse the request but they also addressed a letter to the local Ashkenazic synagogues, asking them to take similar action, which they did. In consequence of this incident, a proclamation was read in all the synagogues of London to the effect that any member who enticed or attempted to entice a Christian to become a Jew would be expelled from the congregation and deprived of all Jewish religious benefits! Despite this foolish and completely un-Halachic pronouncement, converts continued to come into Judaism, most by reason of an impending or existing marriage to a Jew, some out of pure conviction. Among the latter was Lord George Gordon.

Lord George Gordon was born in London, December 26, 1751. He was the younger son of Cosmo George, third Duke of Gordon. At his christening, King George the Second was his godfather. He was reared in Scotland in a virulently anti-Catholic atmosphere. This resulted in Gordon himself being violently anti-Catholic all his life. After serving in the Navy from 1769 to 1772, Gordon returned to Scotland and entered politics. In 1774 he was elected to the British House of Commons.

Both before and during the American Revolution, Gordon was among those members of Parliament who consistently championed the cause of the rebels. In 1779, the government attempted to pass an act relieving British Roman Catholics of their political disabilities in order to increase the rate of Roman Catholic enlistments in the British armed forces so that the dragging fight against the Americans might be waged more effectively. Gordon's pro-Americanism and anti-Catholicism put him into the very forefront of the or-

ganized opposition to the bill.

In December, 1779, he was made president of the United Protestant League, a society formed for the specific purpose of holding the Catholics in check. On June 2, 1780, Gordon presided over a gigantic anti-Catholic rally in London, attended by sixty thousand persons. The emotions whipped up at this rally led to anti-Catholic riots on June 6 and 7 that cost the lives of more than three hundred persons. Twenty-five of the rioting mobsters, including one Jew, were later hanged for murder. On June 9, Gordon was arrested on charges of inciting to riot and high treason. He was acquitted of both charges. There was no proof that he had in any way deliberately instigated or even approved of the riots. Among those who publicly applauded his acquittal was the famous English man of letters, Dr. Samuel Johnson. Gordon remained president of the United Protestant League until 1786, when he had to resign because he was excommunicated by the Established Church for refusal to conform to its beliefs and practices.

Charles Dickens, in his novel *Barnaby Rudge*, indicates that Gordon had shown an interest in Judaism as early as 1780. Various theories have been advanced as to why Gordon decided to become a Jew. The simplest and most likely is that he had lost his faith in Christianity and had found the beliefs of Judaism appealing and satisfying. Other theories which have been advanced are: 1) that he felt himself to be a victim of persecution and wished to become part of a group which had been undergoing persecution for many centuries; and 2) that he believed that he would be accepted by the Jews as the modern Moses who would help them return to Palestine. Whatever his reason or reasons may have been, the facts are as follows:

In June, 1787, he was tried in London and convicted of a charge of libel. After his conviction, he went to Rabbi David Tevele Schiff, Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi, and asked to be converted to Judaism. In typical British style, Chief Rabbi Schiff refused to approve his conversion. He then went to Amsterdam to persuade the rabbis of that city to convert him. Since he was a convicted person out on bail, the English government asked the government of Holland to return

him to England. He was brought back to London on July 22, before he was able to complete the conversion process in Holland. He then went to Birmingham where he was circumcised, converted by a Rabbi Jacob and given the additional name of Israel. He lived in a Jewish home, grew a beard and spent most of his time studying Hebrew. He was tall, thin, with straight, long, reddish brown hair. He wore spectacles and dressed very plainly. He spoke with a harsh, loud voice and his gestures were vehement but awkward. He was eccentric but very definitely not crazy. This last remark is necessary because some Jewish historians have joined in a strange conspiracy with their non-Jewish colleagues to have this sincere proselyte recorded on history's pages as a demented harum-scarum.

On December 7, 1787, he was ordered to return to London to serve his sentence in Newgate Prison. A contemporary newspaper states that, at no time while he was in Birmingham, did he attempt to hide from the law, although his appearance was "so remarkable as almost to defy the recollection of those who formerly knew His Lordship."

In prison, Gordon put on *Tefillin*, phylacteries, every morning, strictly observed the laws of kashrut and organized a Sabbath morning *minyan*, congregation, among the Polish Jewish prisoners in the jail. He refused to let any Jewish prisoner attend this service who had shaved his beard or who kept his head uncovered. He also would refuse to receive such Jews as visitors. From his cell, he corresponded with many prominent persons throughout the world on political and religious matters and gave much charity to indigent Jews in the London community. He signed his letters "Israel ben Abraham G. Gordon."

The rich and influential Jews of London, mostly of English and German extraction, abandoned Gordon completely as soon as they became convinced that he was through politically. They tried to spread the impression that he was mentally unbalanced and insincere. But the poor Jews of London, mostly of Polish and Sephardic lineage, continued to visit him in jail, to treat him with great respect, to bring him kosher food, to address him as "the Right Honorable Israel bar Abraham Lord George Gordon" and to lean

upon his every word with love and esteem—for they knew that, while he was somewhat capricious, he had a brilliant mind, he was not at all insane and he was a sincere, devout Jew.

When Gordon's sentence expired on June 29, 1793, he could be released only if someone of means would guarantee his future good behavior. Gordon's family had disowned him when he converted to Judaism and the local rich Jews were not interested in him for the practical reason already stated. Furthermore, they feared that, if they aided him, they would become involved in difficulties with their politically influential and equally high-minded Christian compatriots. Gordon appeared before the court with the only true friends he had, a number of poor Polish Jews. Because of their poverty, the court would not accept them as guarantors. Gordon was forced to go back to jail. He died in Newgate Prison on November 1, 1793, at the age of forty-one. The prison record says that he died of fever. His Polish friends said that he had died of a broken heart and a broken spirit, brought on by the indifference of the English Jewish community to his fate.

In the final chapter of *Barnaby Rudge*, Charles Dickens wrote:

Many men with fewer sympathies for the distressed and needy, with less abilities and harder hearts, have made a shining figure and left a brilliant name. He had his mourners. The prisoners bemoaned his loss and missed him; for, though his means were not large, his charity was great, and, in bestowing alms among them, he considered the necessities of all alike and knew not distinction of sect or creed.

In a definitive paper on the life of Lord George Gordon, read before the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1913, Israel Solomons provides a proper epitaph for this man's spiritual monument:

Had Lord George Gordon lived in this generation, he would not have perished miserably in a prison cell; but he would have been regarded as a great and noble character and accorded the honor he merited. . . . I cherish his memory, not because he was a "proselyte of righteousness" but because of the love he bore our people and our cause, which he championed in this and other lands.

* * * *

As the historical period under discussion neared its end, the great

Vilna Gaon, Elijah of Vilna (1720-1797), wrote in his Biblical commentary *Aderet Eliyahu*, with reference to Leviticus 19:10

The poor Jew and the convert are as precious to God as any other Jew. But the life of the poor Jew is difficult and the life of the convert is difficult.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LAST TWO CENTURIES

by

ABRAHAM SHUSTERMAN

Less than two centuries have passed since the French Revolution and the beginning of the modern period of Jewish history. In this length of time, Jewish life has undergone a complete transformation. In no area is this change more evident than in the attitude and program of the Jewish people regarding the conversion of non-Jews to the ancient faith. As has been the case through all of Jewish history, changed circumstances and moods have brought deeper insights and broader vistas.

In these 175 years of freedom and equality in some of the western European countries and on the American continent, the universal aspects of Jewish life and thought have had their chance to develop. In the minds of some, this development has produced a determination to share Israel's message with the world, to formulate a positive program for teaching the nations the truths of the Jewish religion. Those who think in this way maintain that if Judaism, breathing the pure air of democracy and liberty, expresses its spirit in any less noble manner, if an "open-door policy" in the Synagogue is not now an historic necessity, then the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah are false

It is too light a thing that you should be My servant merely to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the offspring of Israel; I give you as a light to the nations, that My salvation may be to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6)

This state of mind has not come about suddenly or quickly. It has grown very slowly and it has not yet won complete acceptance.

There are many Jews, including some rabbis, whose minds and hearts have not yet emerged from the numbing insecurity of the medieval ghetto and who have not yet recaptured the prophetic glow of full spiritual freedom.

* * * *

In the year 1820, K. K. *Beth Elohim*, "The Holy Congregation of the House of God," of Charleston, South Carolina, adopting a new synagogal constitution, took a rather lukewarm (and, so far as Negroes were concerned, a very biased) position on the reception of converts

The Congregation will not encourage nor interfere with making proselytes under any pretense whatsoever, nor shall any such be admitted under the jurisdiction of the Congregation, until he, or she, or they, produce legal and satisfactory credentials, from some other Congregation, where a regular Chief, or Rabbi and Hebrew Consistory is established, and, provided he, or she, or they, are not people of color.

Not only did this provision bar Negroes from membership in the congregation; it went beyond the Shulchan Aruch in insisting that a convert must bring positive proof of conversion before admittance to the congregation. For the Shulchan Aruch, the convert's statement to this effect was enough, unless an impending marriage to a Jewish person was involved. But K. K. Beth Elohim demanded the presentation of "legal and satisfactory credentials." The statute reflects, of course, the prevailing moods of both the time and the place: the uncompromising orthodoxy which was to lead, in 1824, to a split in the congregation, and the refusal to recognize the Negro as an equal which was to lead, in 1861, to a civil war.

In the year 1834, Rabbi Akiba Eger the Younger, 1761-1837, spiritual leader of the city of Posen in Polish Prussia, published a *teshuva*, religious decision, in which he instructed an inquirer to abide by the Prussian law which forbade Jews to accept converts. He stated further that, to be on the safe side, Jews should not circumcise Christians and should not even give non-Jews instruction in Judaism. This has been cited on occasion as the learned and objective opinion of a great Talmudist. One who studies carefully the provisions of the Shulchan Aruch set forth in the previous

chapter will discern quickly that it was hardly that. It was the prudent and timely counsel of a wise communal leader. When Rabbi Eger wrote this opinion, Prussia was in the midst of the most vicious anti-Jewish period it had ever experienced. The reigning monarch, Frederick William the Third, a combination of fanatical Christian and romantic nationalist, who believed that Prussia was to become the ideal Christian state, made the lives of the Jews of his kingdom miserable with all manner of prohibition and restriction. For a Prussian Jew of that day to bring a Christian into the Jewish fold was to court destruction of both proselyter and proselyte. In such a situation, what other sort of *teshuva* would one expect Rabbi Akiba Eger to write?

So it was as late as 1820 in the United States and as late as 1834 in Prussia. Gradually the picture became brighter. Gradually a fresh spirit began to move within the Jewish communities of Western Europe and America. One of the harbingers of the new day was Grace Aguilar of Great Britain. Although Miss Aguilar (1816-1847) is best known as a novelist, her intense pride in her religion is exhibited in a series of letters she wrote in 1842, titled *The Jewish Faith: Its Spiritual Consolation, Moral Guidance and Immortal Hope*. In these letters she sets forth the superiority of Judaism over other religions and expresses her faith that, in time, it will become the religion of all mankind.

And then there was Warder Cresson.

WARDER CRESSON

Warder Cresson was born into a well-to-do Quaker family in 1798 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. From early youth, he was given to speculation about religious matters. In 1830 Cresson wrote an anti-Catholic pamphlet deploring what he considered to be the evil tendencies and extravagances of that sect. Dissatisfied with Quakerism, Cresson joined a number of different Protestant denominations but in none of them did he find the spiritual consolation he was seeking. In 1840 he met Rabbi Isaac Leeser, editor of the monthly magazine *The Occident*, who stimulated his interest in Judaism. Cresson was very greatly influenced by Leeser. Filled

with a desire to go to the Holy Land, Cresson sought and obtained, in 1844, the post of American consul in Jerusalem. He left his wife and children in Philadelphia and went alone to live in Palestine. At the termination of his consular appointment in 1848, Cresson was circumcised, converted to Judaism and assumed the name of Michael C. Boaz Israel. It has been said that Cresson's original acceptance of the office of consul was done at the urging of Christian mission societies with the hope that this deeply religious man would spread the Gospel in the Jewish homeland. Instead, he sought out the rabbis of Jerusalem, began the study of Hebrew, became interested in the Talmud and the Zohar and finally decided to change his religious affiliation. Following his conversion Cresson wrote many articles for *The Occident*. In them he criticized the London Society for the Conversion of the Jews, which conducted a mission in Jerusalem. Identifying himself with the Sephardic community, he became known in some Palestinian circles as a miracle worker. He was asked often to intercede with God in his prayers on behalf of the ill and needy.

Cresson returned to Philadelphia in 1849 in order to arrange his affairs so that he might spend the rest of his days in Palestine. His wife and all his children, with the exception of one son, placed a major obstacle in his way by having him committed to a mental institution. A lower court ruled that Cresson was insane but he appealed the verdict. His trial before the higher court in 1851 was one of the most publicized cases of its time. Almost one hundred witnesses were called to testify. The ruling of the lower court was reversed. Cresson was declared to be completely sane.

While in Philadelphia, Cresson worshipped at Leiser's synagogue, *Mikveh Israel*, the historic Sephardic congregation, and observed all the laws and customs of traditional Judaism. In 1851 he published a volume, largely autobiographical, called *The Key of David*. Later, having secured a divorce, he returned to Palestine where he devoted his efforts to certain agricultural and educational ventures which did not endure beyond his life-time. *The Occident* published a number of his articles appealing to American Jews for support of these undertakings. In Jerusalem he married a

Sephardic woman, lived as an oriental Jew and became a prominent member of the Jewish community. When he died, on November 6, 1860, he was accorded high honors. Every Jewish place of business in the city was closed on the day of his interment on the Mount of Olives. To this day, pious Israelis continue to offer prayers at the grave of "the American Ger Tsedek."

AMERICAN REFORM JUDAISM

The greatest strides forward in modern times toward implementation of the universalistic teachings of Judaism took place in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, under the impetus of the rapid rise and growth of American Reform Judaism. A number of rabbis, who had tried and had failed to establish a modern, liberal form of Judaism in both Eastern and Western Europe, came to the New World and tried again. This time they succeeded. They brought with them two major resolutions: to adjust the internal structure of Jewish religious worship and practice to the tempo and temper of the times and to make Judaism's influence felt in the world outside of the synagogue.

It is not that Orthodoxy was devoid of an appreciation of the universal in Judaism or that it did not want the Jew to be a force for good in the non-Jewish world. Quite the contrary! But, by its very nature, it could not change rapidly. Moreover, its theology emphasized that the coming of the Messianic Age was to be determined and timed primarily by the will of God rather than by human effort with divine help. Samson Raphael Hirsch of Germany (1808-1888), leading Orthodox theologian of the nineteenth century, emphasized these concepts in his *Nineteen Letters of Ben Uzziel*, published in 1836. The task of the Jews individually and as a people is to observe scrupulously the *Taryag Mitsvot*, the 613 positive and negative commandments of the Torah. When every Jew has reached this state of spiritual excellence, the human race will be so impressed that the whole world will be converted to the Jewish point of view and acknowledge the Oneness of God. Universal brotherhood will then be achieved and mankind

prepared for the advent of the Messianic Age. The spiritual task of the Jew is to perfect himself inwardly, not as an act of withdrawal from the world but as a self-sacrificial offering upon the altar of duty to mankind. This exalted point of view did not satisfy either the German or the American Reform rabbis of the second half of the nineteenth century. They desired, formulated and presented a program in which the actions of the Jew as well as the teachings of Judaism were to serve as active catalysts in the seething caldron of contemporary world affairs to help bring about the realization of the Messianic dream in the shortest possible time.

The universalism inherent in the Jewish faith came clearly to the fore in the prayers, preaching and teaching of my great predecessor at Har Sinai Congregation in Baltimore, Rabbi David Einhorn (1809-1879). When he came from Pesth in 1852, Har Sinai was a small, struggling congregation. When he was forced to leave Baltimore in April of 1861 to avoid being lynched by a pro-slavery mob, he had the satisfaction of knowing that Har Sinai had become one of the outstanding Reform Jewish pulpits of the United States, thanks to the brilliant and fearless manner in which he had expressed his prophetic idealism.

Bringing non-Jews into Judaism was such a normal and constant process with Einhorn that, when he published his prayer book *Olatih Tamid*, Perpetual Offering, in German and Hebrew in 1858, a service for the acceptance of proselytes was included among the other daily and weekly services. The candidate was asked nine questions about the principles of Judaism. These questions concerned the uniqueness of God, His incorporeality, the spiritual nature of man, the purity of his soul, the mandate to live in imitation of God, the primacy of the Mosaic revelation, the possibilities of communion with God without mediation, the priestly quality of the people of Israel and the binding nature of the divine covenant on all members of this priest-people. A tenth question concerned the convert's "solemn and firm determination" to live by these truths.

That Einhorn believed that Judaism is destined to become the

universal religion is clearly indicated throughout his entire prayer-book. It is given poetic expression in the *Neilah*, the closing service of the Day of Atonement. At the end of this day of fasting, confession and penitence, Rabbi Einhorn led his congregation in this prayer

This evening, so full of light, reminds us still of that glorious evening promised by Thee, on which Thy light will break for all the children of men and the progeny of Israel will be as numerous as the stars of heaven. Arm us, O our Keeper and Guardian, with strength and love for that high mission. May Israel prize as his highest treasure the conviction that both to bear witness to the "One God" and to battle for the "One Humanity" he was sent into the world.

David Einhorn expressed this point of view in all his writings and sermons. To him Israel is a priest-people whose historic task it is to bring about "a spiritual rebirth and the uniting of all men in faith and in love through the agencies of Israel."

In this determination to make both Jew and non-Jew increasingly aware that Judaism was destined for world-wide acceptance, Einhorn was joined by his richly endowed and fearless younger contemporary, Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), founder of the Hebrew Union College, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. As early as 1866, Wise said that the day would come when Christians would recognize that the purpose of "the Christian legend" is to convert the heathen world to the monotheism and ethics of Judaism. There is no doubt that Wise, in his pronouncements, oral and written, was determined not only to defend Judaism from the attacks of its enemies but also to show its superiority over all other religions and thus to win the non-Jew to Judaism. In his *A Defense of Judaism versus Proselytizing Christianity*, published in 1889, he writes

I can show in my books the names of thirty-seven Christian-born persons who embraced Judaism without any solicitation or persuasion on my part. . . . Of the hundreds of converts from Christianity to Judaism, or pure theism, which we have made, we have advertised none, because we consider it a private affair, too holy to be drummed to the curious news seekers.

A very short time thereafter he must have changed his mind about the propriety of giving publicity to conversions to Judaism because in 1891 he editorialized in his weekly *The American Israelite* as follows

Our readers must have noticed of late that we have published in every issue accounts of one or more conversions from Christianity to Judaism. There is little doubt that these are constantly increasing and are of daily occurrence. Owing to their frequency they now attract little attention.

He added that, unlike the occasional Jewish convert who is put on public display by the Christian missionaries, the converts to Judaism are responsible, rational, respectable individuals who are not freaks and do not expose themselves as in a museum to public viewing.

In another *Israelite* editorial, Wise defined the purpose of the mission of Israel

Israel's mission is to bring about the universal triumph of Monotheism.

Not only as journalist but also as theologian and teacher did Isaac M. Wise proclaim this doctrine. He believed that there can be no theology truer than that of Judaism. Therefore Judaism is the predestined religion for all humanity. On his eightieth birthday he told his rabbinic disciples and students

What I have stood for and you now interpret will someday be the truth for all men.

Among the early leaders of American Reform Judaism there was little doubt about the importance and significance of the concept of the Mission of Israel in Jewish theology. Differences of opinion concerned matters of detail, not of essence. Adolph Moses (1840-1902), another able and energetic Reform rabbi, recommended that the name "Judaism" be replaced by the term "Yahvism." This view was expressed in a sermon he delivered at the graduation exercises of the Hebrew Union College in 1894. Rabbi Moses felt that those non-Jews who were ripe for conversion would be more readily attracted to universalistic "Yahvism" than to the more nationalistic "Judaism." Despite the change in nomen-

clature, which evidently was of greater importance to Adolph Moses than to Isaac M. Wise, there is no doubt that the goal sought by Moses was the same as that of Wise. Rabbi Moses declared

For the first time in many centuries an arena has been opened, in this country and in our age, for pure Yahvism to unfold its universal nature, to accomplish its mission as a religion of many races and nations, to gather into its fold those Gentiles whose reason cannot accept the peculiar tenets of Christianity, who are separated from us only by name.

In the concluding portion of his sermon he spoke optimistically of the large number of non-Jews who would flock to the banner of Israel once the name of the faith was changed.

In 1896, in his home community of Louisville, Kentucky, Rabbi Moses delivered three lectures on *The Religion We Offer the Gentiles*. Condemning those who believe that Judaism is synonymous with the Jewish race, Moses thundered

If the Israelites have no wish to make propaganda for their faith, the worse for them and the worse still for their descendants.

He argued that modern Jews must make a choice between a narrow, racist or nationalistic interpretation of the Jewish cult and a broad, world embracing, universalistic Judaism (or Yahvism)

We have long enough been hiding our light under a bushel. We have, like Jonah, been fleeing from the presence of God and have refused to bring His message to the children of men. Let us, even with our feeble power, begin to prepare the day of the Lord. At best it will take centuries and centuries to accomplish this task. But ours is the duty to begin the work and to do it with all our heart, all our soul and all our might. With the all-wise and omnipotent God is left the completion and direction thereof.

Sir Charles Waldston, originally Waldstein, (1856-1927), eminent archeologist and author, carried Moses' Yahvism a step further in his book *The Jewish Question and the Mission of the Jews*, written in 1899. He wrote, "Why should not the religious theist, the Unitarian and all members of similar sects come over to us and be reformed Jews?" He argued that, in addition to the concept of strict monotheism shared with these other denominations, Juda-

ism had the additional advantages of a rich culture and a moral grandeur developed in the course of a long and unbroken history. He proposed the establishment of a Neo-Mosaic Church, with the racial "Judaic" and "Hebraic" elements excluded. The ritual would be in the vernacular but based upon traditional Jewish liturgy. "When once the race of men, prepared by Christianity and Islam, will recognize the true destiny of the Jewish nation as the bearer of the divine light, they will honor the root upon which formerly they looked with contempt; they will grow more closely to it and will become purified fruit, and will enter into the Messianic kingdom which is the fruit of the tree." The people of Israel was dispersed throughout the world to fulfill their sacred mission of finding "willing ears into which to pour what good they have to impart."

A tendency on the part of modern thinkers to define the role of the Jew as the gadfly of humanity, as the agent through whom the world would be led to higher plateaus of intellectual freedom, social reform and religious understanding, has not been uncommon. As the Jew and Judaism complete their work of self-purification and self-perfection, they will gradually be merged into the mass of mankind and will ultimately disappear. Typical of this kind of religious assimilationist was the German foreign minister, Walther Rathenau, assassinated by nationalist terrorists in 1922. A close student of the Bible as well as of history and economics and one of the earliest admirers of Martin Buber, Rathenau once wrote to a non-Jewish friend

Do you know why we Jews were born into this world? In order to call every human being to Sinai. You don't want to go there? If I don't call you, Marx will call you. If Marx doesn't call you, Spinoza will call you. If Spinoza doesn't call you, Christ will call you.

REFORM RABBINICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS

Of even more importance, perhaps, than the utterances of individual Reform rabbis are the pronouncements made by Reform rabbinical conferences in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

From November 3 to 6, 1869, a Conference of American Rabbis

was held in the city of Philadelphia. Among the resolutions passed by this Conference was one dealing with the mission of Israel. It was affirmed that the destruction of the Jewish commonwealth and the dispersion of Jews throughout the world are not to be regarded as punishment for sins but as an opportunity for the descendants of Abraham to fulfill their historic task "to lead the nations to the true knowledge and worship of God." It was further stated that "the selection of Israel as the people of religion, as the bearers of the highest idea of humanity is still, as ever, to be strongly emphasized and for this reason, whenever this is mentioned, it shall be done with full emphasis laid on the world-embracing mission of Israel and the love of God for all His children."

Sixteen years later, on November 16 to 18, 1885, the famous Pittsburgh Conference of Rabbis was held. Isaac M. Wise served as presiding officer. For more than fifty years the platform adopted at this Conference remained the classic expression of the principles of Reform Judaism. Again the doctrine of the mission of Israel was affirmed

We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended . . . this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.

The Bible was called the record of the "consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as the priest of the One God."

Christianity and Islam being daughter religions of Judaism, we appreciate their providential mission to aid in the spreading of monotheistic and moral truth. We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfilment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who operate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

In all individual rabbinic utterances, as well as in all resolutions and formulated guiding principles, Reform Judaism has affirmed the doctrine of the open door. The intensity of aggressiveness in advocating a policy of active proselyting has varied, depend-

ing upon the spirit of the times, the problems faced by each generation of leaders and their temperamental differences. Not all leadership has been as bold and as direct as that of Isaac M. Wise. In the latest official statement of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, its Guiding Principles of 1937, known as the Columbus Platform, the emphasis is on working in harmony with the consecrated leaders of all religious groups rather than on the "mission of Israel" concept. This document declares

We regard it as our historic task to co-operate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth.

One of the basic principles of the earlier Pittsburgh platform which is reaffirmed in the 1937 declaration is that of working in fellowship with Judaism's daughter-religions. With regard to conversion, there is the simple affirmation that "the non-Jew who accepts our faith is welcomed as a full member of the Jewish community."

These proclamations by rabbinic conferences were meant to be guide-lines designed to give modern Judaism a sense of direction, to keep the Jew ever mindful of the universalism inherent in the teachings of the Biblical prophets. Reform Jewish religious leaders used these guide-lines to help solve specific problems as they arose. One major problem concerned the male candidate for conversion. The late Dr. David Philipson, historian of the Reform movement, formulated the problem in these words, "What shall be the requirements for admission into the faith? Is a simple expression of this desire and a confession of faith sufficient or shall initiatory rites be required? Notably it has been the question of circumcision about which this controversy has turned."

The traditional Jewish attitude, of course, is that any male seeking admission into the Jewish religion is expected to undergo circumcision. This rite and ritual immersion are the necessary prerequisites for conversion. Very early in its history, the Reform movement abrogated the necessity of ritual immersions for both male and female converts. On the question of the circumcision of the male, opinion was, at first, divided. While the Philadelphia

Conference of 1869 took no definite stand on this question, most of the rabbis in attendance were of the opinion that circumcision should not be regarded as essential. The question continued to be debated for more than twenty years.

In 1890 a non-Jew petitioned Rabbi Henry Berkowitz of Kansas City to be admitted into the Jewish fold without undergoing circumcision. Rabbi Berkowitz requested an opinion from the leading Reform rabbis of the country. Three, among them Moses Mielziner, Professor of Talmud at the Hebrew Union College, replied that the rite was mandatory. Ten responded that proselytes might be admitted without circumcision. Among this number were such renowned leaders as Isaac M. Wise, Kaufmann Kohler, Gustav Gottheil and Emil G. Hirsch. In the light of the majority opinion, Rabbi Berkowitz received the young man into the Jewish faith without requiring that he be circumcised.

This case and the discussions which ensued convinced the Reform rabbis that they must resolve the matter in a positive and conclusive manner. In 1892 the Central Conference of American Rabbis agreed that any rabbi, with the concurrence of two associates, might accept into the Jewish faith any "honorable and intelligent person, without any initiatory rite." The only requirements were that the person freely seek membership, that he be of good character, that he be sufficiently acquainted with the faith and practices of Judaism and that he give evidence of a sincere desire

1. To worship only the One and Eternal God;
2. To live by God's laws;
3. To adhere in life and death to the sacred cause of Israel;

This point of view has remained unchanged. To this day it is the accepted position of the Reform wing of Judaism.

In 1927 the Central Conference published a rabbinical handbook titled *Judaism, a Manual for the Instruction of Proselytes* to help rabbis prepare candidates for conversion. In this manual and in the discussions that preceded its adoption, it was specifically stated that Judaism welcomes sincere converts, that its doors are always open and that it is a world-religion intended for the entire

human race

Judaism in our day is still carrying out this tradition. It says to all who would accept our faith: You are welcome to share with us every truth and every hope that has come to us from God.

The Manual is designed to give the candidate for conversion a knowledge of the basic beliefs, the ideals and fundamental customs and institutions of Judaism. The volume includes a conversion ceremony. Among the questions asked the candidate are queries about his voluntary acceptance of the Jewish faith, his pledge of loyalty to Judaism, his determination to cast his lot with that of the Jewish people, his promise to lead a Jewish life and to rear his children as Jews. In this and all preceding conversion services, the final question is, "Do you also agree to have male children circumcised?" This question indicates that, while Reform Judaism takes a lenient view on the circumcision of adult male converts, it insists on the rite for male children, born of Jewish parents, whether these parents be proselytes or Jewish-born.

Reform Judaism has also departed from the traditional Jewish position with regard to the conversion of children. In traditional Judaism, a child is not converted automatically when one or both of his parents are converted. He must still go through the initiatory rites of conversion. In 1947 the Central Conference set down the following suggested policies for Reform rabbis: Infants, whether natural or adopted, shall be considered Jews if their parents declare an intention to rear them as Jews. Children of religious school age shall not be required to go through any special ceremony but shall be enrolled as regular students in the religious school. The ceremony of Confirmation at the end of the school course shall be considered the equivalent of a conversion ceremony for these children. Children beyond Confirmation age, i.e., beyond the age of fifteen or sixteen, shall be in the same category as adult candidates for conversion and shall be required to go through a period of instruction and a conversion ceremony.

THE CONVERTS CONTINUE TO COME

Although there was no Jewish missionary society to urge them

on, the converts continued to come. Most of them took the final step because of love for a Jewish man or a maid but this does not mean that their conversions were without genuine, sincere dedication. A scientific study of the backgrounds and motivations of converts to Judaism would be a worthwhile project for a qualified psychologist. He is quite likely to come to the conclusion that the affinity which exists between the love-struck Jew and non-Jew is as much or even more spiritual in nature than it is physical. Else how may one explain the common experience of rabbis that converts who come into Judaism because of marriage are, on the average, more loyal and devoted members of the synagogue than is the average born-Jew?

David A. Magee, member of a prominent Christian family of Sioux City, Iowa, fell in love with Ada, daughter of Godfrey Hattenbach, one of the first Jewish settlers in that mid-Western city. He converted to Judaism and married Ada in 1876. He became a leader in the meat packing industry of this region. He took an active part in Jewish organizational work. In 1897 he was elected mayor of Sioux City. His political and commercial activities brought him fame and fortune. His death in 1927 was mourned greatly because he had been, for more than fifty years, a *ger tsedek*, a righteous proselyte whose deeds had shed luster upon the Jewish and general communities in his native city.

Nahida Ruth Remy Lazarus, nee Strumhoefel, (1849-1928) was born in Berlin, Germany. Her family was Prussian, Protestant, prominent in military and political circles. From a very early age she was an ardent feminist. In her book, *Ich Suchte Sich*, My Search, she tells how, as a girl of ten, she studied both the Old and the New Testaments very carefully and was repelled by Paul's contention that the sex relationship is demeaning (First Corinthians 7:9) and by Jesus' apparent lack of regard for his mother (Matthew 12:48-49). She gave outward evidence of her inmost thoughts by refusing to be confirmed in the Lutheran faith. She married the literary critic, Max Remy, and, in 1881, was left a widow.

Under the guidance of the distinguished Berlin psychologist,

Moritz Lazarus (1824-1903), she studied the writings of the outstanding German Jewish scholars of her generation, Jost, Graetz, Zunz, Jellinek and Abraham Geiger. After reading Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, she decided to become a Jew and started for Geneva, Switzerland, to complete the conversion process there. On the way, she stopped at Freiburg on the Rhine River to visit her beloved teacher, Professor Lazarus, who had taken ill in this city while on vacation. She never got to Geneva. The sick professor recovered, helped convert his disciple to Judaism and married her. She was forty-six years of age; he was seventy-one. As Nahida Ruth Lazarus, she won a place of affection amounting almost to veneration in European Jewry.

She wrote a book dealing with prayers in the Bible and Talmud. She also wrote *Das Juedische Weib*, *The Jewish Woman*, in which she showed how favorable the Jewish attitude toward woman has always been. In both these books she endeavors to prove that Judaism is a finer religion than Christianity. She also published many novels, stories and essays in Jewish and non-Jewish periodicals. After Professor Lazarus' death, she edited and published his memoirs.

Among the many women who have embraced Judaism in the twentieth century, none has been more creative than Yelizaveta Ivanovna Zhirkova (1889-1949), who is known in modern Hebrew literature simply as Elisheva. Her mother was English and her father a Russian of Greek Orthodox faith. She was born in Riazan but spent her youth in Moscow, where she came in close contact with Jewish life. Her interest in Judaism was aroused by a pious Jewish family with whom she was very friendly and also by the Zionist aspirations of her Jewish fellow students at the university. Studying Hebrew and Yiddish, she attained proficiency in both languages and began to translate prose and poetry from these tongues into Russian. When she married the Hebrew writer, Simon Bychowsky, she started to use the pen name Elisheva. In 1919 she published two volumes of original verse in Russian, taking as her dedicatory aphorism the significant statement of Ruth, "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God." The last poem in these

volumes was titled *Eretz Yisrael*, The Land of Israel.

Formally accepting Judaism as her religion, Elisheva began to show a remarkable interest in the Zionist movement and especially in the renaissance of Hebrew literature. Her Hebrew poetry showed an unusual depth of feeling about this national and cultural rebirth. Because of Elisheva's great love for Zion, she felt impelled to go there to live out her life. In the years preceding and encompassing the establishment of the State of Israel, the poetess Elisheva was one of the most honored daughters of Israel in the Holy Land. Before she died in 1949, Elisheva wrote her own eloquent epitaph

When I die, let them say:

"She was a stranger who left her birthplace,

For she loved so much the Jewish people. . . .

May she find rest in the shadow

Of the eternal walls of Zion, our strength;

May she sleep a trustful sleep, be brightly blessed,

And, from the heights of heaven,

May Judea's sun shine on her forever."

Perhaps the most exceptional ger of modern history is Aimé Pallière of France (1873-1949). He is exceptional in that, loving Judaism with all his heart, soul and mind and serving for a time as assistant rabbi of a Paris synagogue, he never formally converted to Judaism. Technically, he lived, died and was buried as a Roman Catholic.

Born in a small town near Lyon, Aimé Pallière was reared in an atmosphere of pious Catholicism and was dedicated to the priesthood. Until he attained young manhood he had implicit faith in the teachings of his ancestral religion. One autumn evening in Lyon he and a friend were attracted by the sounds of a beautiful chant coming from a synagogue. Although Catholicism then taught that a devout believer should not take part in worship in a house of prayer of another religion, the two entered the synagogue where the congregation was in the midst of the *Neilah*, the closing service of the Day of Atonement. Pallière wrote later that this service stirred him deeply. The long continued existence of the people of Israel and the significance of their worship and

their Messianic longings impressed the pious youth. He wrote

In the mood that I then was, no other aspect of Judaism could have impressed me to a greater degree than its religious vitality. There certainly is no other which interprets in more characteristic fashion the ancient genius and role of Israel.

Pallièrè resolved to study Hebrew. He began to take an increasing interest in synagogal affairs. A scholarly volume on Jewish religious practice by Leo de Modena brought him an understanding of the reasons for the religious observances of Judaism. His reading also ushered in a period of doubt, confusion and indecision. In rapid succession he joined several Protestant sects. Not finding the satisfaction which he sought, he returned to the Catholic Church. As he was taking Holy Communion, a voice seemed to ask, "Do you believe in the Real Presence? Do you believe in the Incarnation and in the divinity of Christ?" Pallièrè was not sure of the answer.

It was the Hebrew Bible that led him out of his confusion. Of this experience he wrote, "Through the Hebrew syllables with their sonorous cadence, something of the soul of Israel reached me." His teachers at the Lyon seminary remonstrated with him for his interest in what was for them an ancient heresy. One of them was Abbé Augustin Lehman, a converted Jew, under whom Pallièrè studied the Hebrew Bible and especially the prophets, upon whose words so much of Christian doctrine is based. The young student reached the conclusion "that the Jews were right not to embrace Christianity upon Scriptural proofs so inconclusive."

Because of the protests of his mother, Pallièrè destroyed the phylacteries he had made with his own hands but persisted in his visits to the synagogue and in his study of Hebrew sources. Discussions with his teachers about the cruel practices of the Inquisition led Pallièrè into further doubt about the validity of Catholic doctrine. Just as the desire for the satisfaction of his spiritual hunger was not satisfied within Protestantism, so his early attempts to find lasting comfort in Judaism were equally unavailing. Although he remained strangely attracted to the ritual of the synagogue, the sermonic interpretations of the Chief Rabbi of

Lyon, Dr. Alfred Levy, failed to satisfy his heart. Finally he was placed in touch with Chief Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh of Leghorn, Italy. Through Rabbi Benamozegh, Pallière found an appropriate answer and a satisfying way.

Correspondence between the two began in 1895, when Pallière was twenty-two years of age. His initial request was that the rabbi accept him into the Jewish faith. Benamozegh's reply set the pattern for the life and teaching of Aimé Pallière.

In order to be our brother, in the sense that you want it, there is no need for you to embrace Judaism in the manner that you understand it. It is not necessary for you to submit to the limitations of our law.

Rabbi Benamozegh drew the following distinction between Jew and gentile

The former, as priests of humanity, are subjected to the priestly rules of Judaism. The latter, as the laymen of humanity, are subject only to the one, ancient, eternal, universal religion in whose service the Jews have been placed.

While a layman, i.e., a Gentile monotheist, may, if he so desires, become a priest, i.e., a full Jew, he is not required to do so.

Accepting this distinction, Pallière never actually renounced Christianity nor did he become a Jew in the fullest sense of the term. There was no formal conversion. Devoting himself passionately to Judaism and its teachings, he became what the director of the *École Rabbiniq*ue of Paris called "the first and last high priest of the Noachide Religion." According to the ancient Jewish tradition, the Noachides are not asked to accept the entire Mosaic law. They are, however, required to lead a just and ethical life and to observe the prohibitions against blasphemy, idolatry, incest, murder, theft and eating the flesh of a live animal. Perhaps, in the strictest technical sense, Pallière should be considered an extraordinary honorary member or a highly honored associate member of the house of Israel rather than a convert to Judaism.

This Jewishly acceptable religious approach is based upon the theory that, prior to the Sinaitic revelation of the Law, which established the requirements for a completely acceptable Jewish life, God had revealed to all mankind another way of life accept-

able to Him. This revelation was given to Noah and his descendants. A non-Jew lives a life pleasing in the eyes of God if he keeps the seven principal Noachide commandments. The Italian rabbi, Benamozegh, advised Pallière to accept this program for himself, adding "If you adopt the religious position which I would like to see you adopt, you will really belong to Judaism and Christianity at the same time." Other rabbis agreed with this procedure. Pallière, in his own mind, became a connecting link between Church and Synagogue.

The Jewish activities of Noachide Aimé Pallière constitute an almost unbelievable list: Founder and president of *Union Universelle de la Jeunesse Juive*, International Association of Jewish Youth; member of executive board of the Zionist Organization of France; instructor at *École Rabbinique*, Rabbinical Seminary, of Paris; regular preacher in *Le Consistoire General de France*, French liberal synagogue; editor of French Jewish periodical *Foi et reveil*, Faith and Awareness; editor of Benamozegh's *Israel and Humanity*, 1914; author of his own autobiography *The Unknown Sanctuary*, 1926, and of *Jerusalem, A Religious Center for Israel and for Humanity*, 1918; *Judaism and Its Distinctive Characteristics*, 1921; *Henri Bergson and Judaism*, 1933; *The Jewish Soul and God*, 1934; and *The Raised Veil*, 1937.

When the Nazis occupied Paris during the Second World War, Pallière was seized and imprisoned. He miraculously survived this ordeal, although many were led to believe that he had died in prison. A Jewish disciple of Pallière who spent the last Yom Kippur before Pallière's death with him testifies that, even though in poor health, Pallière insisted on fasting for the entire twenty-four hours and recited the entire day's liturgy in Hebrew and in French. Although he died in the Abbaye de Saint Michel and was buried as a Catholic, no one who knew him intimately, whether Catholic or Jew, ever doubted that Pallière considered himself to be in spirit a member of the family of Abraham. His case is, indeed, unique in the annals of our faith.

"OUR GOD WAITS FOR US!"

The drive within the Reform movement toward universal acceptance of the basic teachings of Judaism added a new dimension to "the four ells of the Halacha" but it also had one very unfortunate result. The Talmud wisely declares that "God, the Torah and the people of Israel are one." Without all three of these elements, Judaism is not and cannot be complete. In its keen desire to have all the world hear and heed the word of God and the message of the Torah, the Reform movement came perilously close to cutting itself off from the people to whom that word and that message have been entrusted.

This unbalanced approach to a well-rounded Jewish religious philosophy took the form of an emotional, at times almost pathological, opposition to the growing Zionist movement, to the desire of the overwhelming majority of world Jewry to develop a Jewish homeland in Palestine, a place where the Jew would be master of his own cultural and political affairs, a place where a new Torah might someday be written and new religious and philosophic insights might be developed for the Jewish people and for all mankind. This antagonism to Jewish nationalism was accompanied by an espousal of an almost equally intense secular nationalism, a sort of Jewish equivalent of "My country—may she always be right; but, right or wrong, my country!" This was especially noticeable in the United States where the Reform movement was strongest.

Gradually a more favorable sentiment toward Zionism began to manifest itself in the Reform ranks. As the descendants of ghettoized and oppressed East Europeans began to find their place within the Reform movement and rabbinate, as Jewry and enlightened humanity became more sensitive to the realities of worldwide anti-Semitism, the Reform points of view reflected this change. By the time the State of Israel was established in 1948, only a few irreconcilable Reform rabbis remained adamant in their thinking. By 1948 the overwhelming majority of the members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis had outgrown

the controversies of a past generation. Two of the outstanding figures of twentieth-century American Zionism, Stephen Samuel Wise, 1874-1949, and Abba Hillel Silver, 1893-1963, were Reform rabbis. The overwhelming majority of the Reform leadership approved the Columbus Platform of 1937 which declared

In all lands where our people live, they assume and seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of citizenship and to create seats of Jewish knowledge and religion. In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.

The blind spot had been removed from the universal strivings of the rabbinical idealists. It was and is now realized by all genuinely dedicated Jewish teachers and scholars that there is no contradiction between the desire of a religious people for complete self-development and self-expression and its desire to share the results of its inner blossoming with the rest of the world. In American Reform Judaism, God, the Torah and the people of Israel have become and are now very firmly one.

* * * *

The divinely ordained mission of Israel was emphasized strongly in the teachings and writings of the distinguished theologian, Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), son-in-law of David Einhorn and successor to Isaac Mayer Wise as president of the Hebrew Union College. In Kohler's major work, *Jewish Theology*, he sets forth the historic background of the mission-concept to show that it is inherent in Judaism as a totality and is not exclusively an expression of Reform Judaism. He points out that the rabbis of old pictured Abraham as a wandering missionary. He refers to the rabbinic statement that "God sent Israel among the nations that it might win a rich harvest of proselytes." The concept of mission is implicit in many of the traditional prayers, such as the *Alenu*. Coming down to his own day, Dr. Kohler expresses his own opinion and that of his colleagues

Judaism is not to follow the proselytizing methods of the Church, which aims to capture souls by wholesale conversion without due regard for the attitude and conviction of the individual. But we can no longer afford to shut the gate to those who wish to enter, impelled by conviction or other motives having a religious bearing, even though they do not conform to the Talmudic law.

A complete analysis of "The Mission of Israel" concept was presented by Kohler in 1919 in a lengthy paper read before the Central Conference of American Rabbis. In the hectic aftermath of the First World War, this outstanding theologian insisted that the future welfare of mankind depends upon the fulfillment of our sacred mission. It is imperative that the Jews obey the mandate of God to become a priest-people and that the lofty principles of Judaism be shared with all humanity.

Should this mission of the Jew for his One and Only God cease at the very time when the world needs him most and is actually waiting for him to present the truths of our sages and seers in its immaculate purity, cleansed from the alloys which depreciated its value in the eyes of all thinking people? Yet only in living and working *in* and *with* the world for his Only God can he achieve this mission.

Kaufmann Kohler interpreted this mission in its broadest sense. He realized that there is a difference between the mere conversion of people to a church and their wholehearted acceptance of the spiritual attitude toward life that Judaism demands. Kohler was more concerned with the latter than the former. He regarded Israel's spiritual regeneration as a prerequisite to the fulfillment of the Jewish mission to the world. The Messianic hope would eventually lead all men, Jews and Gentiles, to the mountain of the Lord. To win converts, Christianity has been forced to compromise with paganism. It has compromised to the point where it no longer represents a simon-pure religious monotheism. Judaism has not compromised and will not compromise. She is willing to wait, as she has been waiting for centuries, until mankind is able and ready to accept her invitation to walk in the way of the Only God.

In the discussion that followed the reading of Dr. Kohler's paper, his successor at New York's Temple Beth-El, Samuel

Schulman (1864-1955), clarified the nature of our mission

Briefly put, it means to bear witness to God. How Israel is to witness to God will be determined by the peculiar needs of any particular time or any particular country. It is a question of method. Whether Israel is to be an active missionary—whether he is to be a martyred missionary—whether in lands that give him perfect freedom, he is to live with spiritual intensity and thus be an example, drawing men to himself—or whether, availing himself of perfect freedom of conscience, he is to be active in the intellectual controversies of the day and make positive propaganda for his faith, is purely and simply a matter of method. The fact remains that the business of the Jew is to bear witness to God.

Perhaps the most powerful modern voice reminding Israel of its ancient promise, its divine obligation, was that of Rabbi Leo Baeck (1873-1956). Germany's leading rabbi, he rose to greatness before the advent of Hitler. He was the faithful shepherd of his flock, in the liberal synagogues of Berlin before the Second World War and within the concentration camp of Theresienstadt during that catastrophe, in terrifying circumstances that would have broken a weaker man. In the post-war years, Dr. Baeck was president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism and lecturer at the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion. He was venerated by world Jewry as one who had achieved the status of sainthood in his lifetime.

More than a half century ago, Dr. Baeck wrote *Das Wesen des Judenthums*, translated into English in 1926 under the title *The Essence of Judaism*. In it he insisted that "the Jewish religion is intended to become the religion of the whole world." A missionary obligation was imposed upon Israel from the very beginning of its history. "Every presupposition and every aim of Judaism is directed towards the conversion of the world to itself." In the summer of 1949, at the convention of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the aged seer spelled out the meaning of the words he had written as a young man. He raised his voice in support of a missionary program directed toward the non-Jewish world. "The Mission of Israel," his address on this occasion, may become the most important Jewish religious document of the twentieth century.

After presenting the reasons for the cessation of Jewish missionary activity in the days of the Romans, Baeck analyzed the attempts on the part of Buddhists, Muslims and Christians to establish effective missionary programs. Speaking with reverence for all honest religious undertakings, Dr. Baeck made it clear that neither Buddhist, Muslim nor Christian had succeeded nor would succeed. "Mankind is hungry and thirsty for that which Judaism can say, what Jews full of Judaism can say." A successful mission requires trained missionaries. Books and pamphlets alone will not perform the task. Judaism must be written on the heart as well as on the mind. Judaism's missionaries, especially trained in the rabbinical seminaries, must "have a trend of mysticism in them. They will go out and it will be a wonderful dissemination."

Following this stirring presentation, some present, like Rabbi Moses C. Weiler of South Africa, argued that the mission should be confined to Jews. Dr. Phyllis Abrahams of Great Britain disagreed with Rabbi Weiler. She argued that the mission must be to both the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds through the personal influence of "great, holy and saintly Jewish individuals. Their effect on Christians would be astonishing." Many rabbis and laymen were moved greatly by the words with which Dr. Baeck concluded

We must free ourselves from the narrow mind, from the little thought. Only a people, only a community with great ideas, with the great way of thinking, is able to have a mission, to send out missionaries. All depends on us—*Our God waits for us.*

THE PRAYER BOOK

Some consideration should be given to the evidences of missionary concern in the Jewish Prayerbook. In both traditional prayerbooks, the *Siddur* and the *Machzor*, and in the more modern or revised prayerbooks, there is a strong universalistic emphasis. An outstanding example is the prayer known as the *Alenu* in the traditional liturgy and as the *Adoration* in the Reform ritual. It is a majestic prayer, proclaiming God as the universal King. The establishment of His kingdom on earth, the theme of this prayer,

will be characterized by the cessation of the worship of "false gods," by world-wide allegiance to the one and only God of all the earth and by the fulfillment of the prophetic dream, "On that day the Lord shall be one and His Name shall be one." In the Reform liturgy this hope becomes even more explicit

Unbelief shall disappear and error shall be no more. All men shall invoke Thy Name. All created in God's image will become one in spirit and one in fellowship.

Another example may be cited from the special benedictions used on the High Holy Days. The Hebrew is particularly expressive. It declares that "*Kol ha-ma'aseem*, all created things shall fear Thee and all created beings bow down before Thee. They shall all be made into *agudah ahat*, one group with perfect hearts." A subsequent prayer declares "May every existing being know that Thou hast made it; may every breathing thing proclaim, 'The Lord, the God of Israel, is King and His kingdom rules over all.'"

Many of the High Holy Day prayers emphasize universality. The *Shofar* service for the blowing of the ram's horn is a notable example. It is preceded by the poem, already mentioned by Dr. Seligson, *Vaye'etayu kol l'avdecha*, "All the world shall come to serve Thee," written by Eleazar Kalir in the seventh century and expressing the hope that humanity will eventually unite in acknowledging the sovereignty of God. "Throughout the continents Thy truth they shall acclaim. People that knew Thee not shall be in quest of Thee."

The Reform ceremony of blowing the *Shofar* or ram's horn on the New Year ends with these words

Fortify our hearts that we may labor willingly and, if need be, suffer cheerfully for the triumph of Thy word. Sustain us with hope that we may confidently await the day when knowledge of Thee shall reach the uttermost parts of the world. O hasten the blessed time when all dwellers on earth shall hearken unto the sound of the *Shofar* and shall worship as one brotherhood at Thy holy mountain.

The Reform ritual for the close of the Day of Atonement stresses the hope of the eventual conversion of mankind to the

faith of the Jew

This twilight hour reminds us of the eventide when, according to Thy gracious promise, Thy light will arise over all the children of men and Israel's spiritual descendants will be as numerous as the stars in heaven. Endow us, our Guardian, with strength and patience for our holy mission. Grant that all the children of men may recognize the goal of their changeful career, so that they exemplify by their zeal and love for mankind the truth of Israel's message, "One humanity on earth even as there is but One God in heaven."

The prayer continues with the sublime thought that while only God knows when "this work of reconciliation shall be fulfilled," yet this is part of the divine promise to Israel. In that day, instead of the usual formula of the *Shema*, "Hear, O Israel," the universe will resound with this augmented credal statement, "Hear O Israel, *hear all mankind*, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Then, it is promised, God's house "shall be called a house of prayer for all people and all nations shall flow unto it."

While at times the poetic quality of devotional compositions may obscure the basic truths underlying the prayers, there is no doubt that, in both his daily and Holy Day worship, the Jew asks God to speed the time of the universal acceptance of Israel's religious ideals. In short, he prays continually for the conversion of the world to the teachings of Judaism.

THE WHEELS BEGIN TO TURN

Not all rabbis, not even all Reform rabbis, are convinced that the universal tendencies in Judaism must necessarily call forth an active effort on the part of the Jew to win mankind to his religious way of thinking. Such a distinguished and respected contemporary scholar as Dr. Solomon B. Freehof, past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, has stated

We have always insisted that religions can be universal without war between religions and without capturing members from each other. We already have a universal religion, a uniquely universal religion. We are the one universal religion that believes that other universal religions can coexist with us.

It is altogether possible that, if a poll were to be taken of world

rabbinic opinion right now, a majority of the world's rabbis would vote against any suggested program set up for the purpose of proselyting non-Jews. If a similar poll were taken among the Jewish laity, it is quite likely that the percentage of negative votes would be even higher than among the rabbis. This does not mean necessarily that the judgment of these majorities would be correct. It might mean, in this particular instance, either that individuals have been misinformed or are timid or want to let well enough alone or do not believe that Judaism is the best of the world's religions or think Jews are a superior people and that Judaism is too good for the common people. It is difficult to understand why any dedicated teacher of religion should hesitate to propagate the religious point of view which he accepts as his own and regards as valid. A person who is convinced that he knows the truth should want to share it with others.

The first incorporated Jewish missionary society in modern times was established in 1944 by an American, Swedish-born journalist, David Horowitz, of Orthodox Jewish extraction and himself married to a convert. While working in Jerusalem in 1942, Mr. Horowitz was directly instrumental in converting to Judaism Boake Carter, a well-known radio news commentator. This experience led Mr. Horowitz, after returning to the United States, to organize, in February, 1944, the United Israel World Union, "an international movement to disseminate the Decalogue Faith both within and beyond the confines of Jewry." Mr. Horowitz says that, in making the study which resulted in the founding of the UIWU, he was greatly moved by the following statement made before the Central Conference of American Rabbis on July 12, 1895, by Rabbi Isaac S. Moses (1847-1926), younger brother of Rabbi Adolph Moses, already cited in these pages

To be true to the spirit of our religion, true to the mission of Israel which he received at Sinai, we must take practical energetic measures to reclaim, first, the children of the household, to Judaize the Jews, and through them, directly and indirectly, draw within the sphere of our religious influence those of the non-Jewish population who hunger for truth and righteousness. In a word, we must enter upon a course of active propaganda, or, for lack of a better expression, do missionary

work within and without Judaism. Judaism is, by its very nature, a missionary religion, a social force, an ethical movement.

For Mr. Horowitz, a highly respected newspaper correspondent at the United Nations, UIWU is a labor of love, a project to which he dedicates all his spare time and energy. UIWU maintains an office at 507 Fifth Avenue, New York City, publishes a monthly bulletin, and subsists on bulletin subscriptions, freewill offerings and contributions. Mr. Horowitz claims that he has attracted thousands of non-Jews to Judaism in the last fifteen years. Groups of his converts have organized themselves into self-sustaining units in West Olive, Michigan, a small village between Grand Haven and Holland, and in West Union-Wilbur, West Virginia, a locality some thirty-five miles west of Clarksburg.

Mr. Horowitz has not been able to win the support of many prominent rabbis or laymen because of the peculiar type of Judaism which he advocates. In addition to stressing ethical monotheism, circumcision, *kashrut*, and Sabbath and holy day observance, Mr. Horowitz also teaches "that the ten tribes of Israel, hitherto lost in identity, exist in the world today; that, during their long dispersion, both houses of Israel turned to Greco-Roman-Egyptian tenets which they substituted, in the main, for the true inspired Mosaic code; that, if the great plan of Prophecy is to be fulfilled, a Union must now take place between the two separated houses of Israel whose breach has remained unhealed since the split of the Commonwealth after Solomon's reign." Mr. Horowitz has built up the number of his supporters by convincing a goodly number of non-Jews that they are descended from the Lost Ten Tribes. Although Mr. Horowitz is, undoubtedly, a dedicated, sincere, well-intentioned person, he is not likely to gain much rabbinical support for this kind of missionary approach.

During a period highlighted by two world wars and by Hitlerism, the world Jewish community was preoccupied with the problems of self-defense and survival. It concentrated its attention upon the saving of Jewish lives, the preservation of Jewish institutions and the creation of the State of Israel. By the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, world Jewry had emerged

from the ordeal with one-third of its number destroyed but with its ranks, discipline and spirit unbroken. It now entered upon a stage of renewed emphasis on universalism. Younger religious leaders began to feel keenly that Jewish religionists have an obligation to their own spiritual heritage, to the spiritually hungry among their neighbors and to a secularized society to become more aggressive in the missionary field or, at least, more openly hospitable to candidates for conversion to Judaism.

This new trend was accelerated by the adoption of a resolution by the Central Conference of American Rabbis at its annual convention in Cincinnati in 1950. A preamble to the resolution prepared by twelve rabbis declared that the time was ripe for more positive action in conversionist efforts. However, the resolution adopted by the Conference omitted the preamble and resolved merely "to create a committee to study practical means of extending the influence and acceptance of the Jewish religion." Although the presiding officer called it "an innocuous resolution," it has resulted in a program of action. A few influential members of the Conference argued against the resolution, urging the rabbis to concentrate on their own people and pleading with them to stay out of the missionary field. Others were equally determined to create an effective program of winning to the Jewish faith not only the unaffiliated among the Jewish-born but unaffiliated non-Jews as well. One rabbi declared in the course of the debate

There are vast numbers of unchurched people in the United States. Call them secularists, if you will. We can go to these. All the other churches have home missions. We have a perfect right to go to these unchurched people and to try to win them for Judaism.

The motion to establish the committee passed the Conference by a very narrow margin.

In January of 1951, a Committee on the Unaffiliated was appointed, with Rabbi David Max Eichhorn as chairman. After a careful study, extending over a period of more than six years, the Committee presented a lengthy report to the 1957 convention of the CCAR. In part, the report stated

The mood of the discussion preceding the passage of the 1950 resolu-

tion indicated that, in this study, the Committee on the Unaffiliated was to be guided by the following considerations: The CCAR did not contemplate the employment of professional missionaries. No attempt was to be made to convert to Judaism those who are already formally affiliated with any other accepted religious denomination. What was desired by the Conference was a study of practical means for attracting into the synagogue those persons of Jewish and non-Jewish birth who are in accord, spiritually and intellectually, with the religious teachings of Judaism and who have not formally identified themselves with any church or synagogue. In other words, the committee was to consider worthy ways through which to reach worthy religiously unaffiliated Jews and non-Jews. . . .

Now the Committee presents to the Conference for its consideration and approval a suggested program of practical means for extending the influence and acceptance of the Jewish religion . . . as follows:

1. The preparation and distribution of appropriate tract literature. These tracts should set forth the essential beliefs and practices of Judaism simply and attractively. They should state that we welcome into our religious fellowship all sincere and like minded persons who desire to join that fellowship.

2. Appropriate national and local radio and television programs. Rabbis and others who have access to these media of communication should be persuaded to make a concerted effort to present the basic doctrines of Judaism to the American listening and viewing publics in a straightforward, factual, affirmative manner. Interested persons in the listening and viewing audiences would be encouraged to seek further information about the Jewish religion.

3. Congregational preaching missions. Such a preaching mission, which might also be called a Torah Convocation or Religious Forum or any other suitable descriptive term, would consist of a well organized series of lectures on the basic tenets of Judaism by an outstanding rabbi. Each lecture would be fitted into a religious service conducted every night of the lecture series. . . . The Committee believes that the employment of this technique on the widest possible scale, with some of the ablest members of the Conference devoting themselves completely to this work for a period of a month or more each year, would produce valuable results. Such a preaching mission, held in each congregation once every three or four years, would lift the members of the congregation to higher levels of religious interest, understanding and enthusiasm. Unaffiliated Jews would be attracted into the synagogue and non-Jews in attendance would be stimulated intellectually and spiritually.

. . . The Committee is strongly of the opinion that the entire matter of seeking to attract the unaffiliated into the synagogue is one which, until now, has not received from this Conference the earnest attention

which it merits and that the time has come to embark upon a carefully planned program of education and invitation with vigor and with determination.

This report of the Committee on the Unaffiliated was received with enthusiasm and adopted without a dissenting vote. The Executive Board of the Conference was instructed to implement the recommendations of the Committee. The CCAR, by its action, gave new life to a spiritual fire which had been burning slowly and dispiritedly for more than fifteen hundred years.

The same "stirrings of the heart" that are moving Reform Judaism are evident within the Conservative movement in the United States. Among the leading spokesmen for Conservatism there are strong differences of opinion over method, although there is agreement that the Jewish religion must bring the world a message for all humanity. Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, in his book *Judaism Under Freedom*, admits that American Jews are often criticized by their Christian neighbors as being exclusive and particularistic because of their refusal to engage in active proselytism. Rabbi Eisenstein differentiates between the ideals of a religion and its *sancta*. These *sancta* would be a religion's scriptures, holy days, ceremonials, hero-personalities, mode of worship and history. It is possible for two religions to have the same ideals but not the same *sancta*. Eisenstein insists that it is our duty to share our ideals with the world but not our *sancta*. This sharing does not mean conversion in the accepted sense but rather it means influence. "The truth is that the universalism of a religion should consist in the universal applicability of its values."

Feeling that there is no real meaning to the mission theory of Reform Judaism and other Jewish universal teachings, Rabbi Jacob B. Agus, another leading Conservative thinker, regards it as wrong for a people to think of itself as existing "only by virtue of supposed usefulness to the outside world." Jewry should exist as what Agus calls a "creative minority." This minority has three outstanding characteristics: First, it senses its fundamental unity with the general population; second, it evolves new values for the general community of which it is a part and expands the cultural horizons

of the whole community; finally, "a creative minority is value-centered and oriented to the future."

Though different in expression, the views of Rabbis Eisenstein and Agus seem to be in basic agreement. Ideals are to be shared, but a missionary program is neither necessary nor desirable.

On the other hand, certain outstanding Conservative spokesmen are in complete agreement with many of their Reform colleagues that the time is ripe for a more aggressive missionary program. One of the most revered scholars and leaders of the Conservative group was the late Dr. Solomon Goldman who made this truth explicit in a statement in his experimental prayerbook, *Tefilot v'Shereem, Prayers and Songs*, published in 1938. He wrote

Judaism means to convert the world, not to convert itself. It will not die in order not to live. It disdains a victory by defeating itself, in giving up its most essential doctrines, its most sacred symbols, its most precious traditions, its most vital teachings. It has confidence in the world. It hopes and prays and waits patiently for the Great Day when the world will be ripe for its acceptance.

In a chapter on "Missionary Activity and Religious Tolerance" in his book *Judaism for the Modern Age*, Conservative Rabbi Robert Gordis gives a clear analysis of the entire problem of missionizing. He points out that Christianity is familiar with the difficulties presented by so-called "rice Christians" whose acceptance of a new faith is not wholly for the sake of the religion itself. He also shows that the acceptance of Judaism means "taking upon oneself all the liabilities and discriminations under which the Jews labor everywhere." He deals with the assertion, frequently cited in the name of the great medieval philosopher Maimonides, that Christianity and Islam are Judaism's partners in spreading the doctrine of monotheism. But, he says, perhaps Israel's daughter religions have failed to carry out this great task. The condition of the world seems to indicate that the obligation to fill the world with the knowledge of the one and only God now rests upon Judaism alone. "Perhaps the time has come to renew the active missionary role of Judaism, now dormant for nearly two millenia."

These words of Rabbi Gordis were antecedent to a more definite

summons in an article he wrote for the *National Jewish Monthly* of March, 1958, "Has the Time Arrived for Jewish Missionaries?" Here he speaks of the conversion of individuals and groups, the need for new acquisitions by a people who have lost millions of their members in recent years as the result of Nazi brutality and of the quest for a new faith by millions who find no satisfaction in any of the infinite varieties of Christianity. Realizing that there are good reasons why Jews should consider the establishment of a missionary program but that there are "substantial drawbacks as well," Rabbi Gordis recommends these steps:

1. "A frank and full discussion of the idea by all interested parties";
2. "A pilot missionary effort to be conducted in Japan," where there has been considerable interest in such a program;
3. The establishment in the United States of information centers on Judaism. The purpose of these centers would be to give the non-Jew authoritative information about the Jewish faith. Experience has shown that the widespread sowing of knowledge of Judaism has always attracted proselytes.

Several years ago, Mr. Ben Maccabee of Chicago, a refugee from Nazi Germany and a Conservative Jew, was instrumental in organizing the Jewish Information Society of America. This Society numbers among its membership many prominent American rabbis and laymen. While, as its name indicates, it is interested in disseminating information about Judaism to both Jews and non-Jews, its literature indicates quite clearly that the winning of non-Jewish converts to Judaism is among its major purposes. The Society publishes a quarterly magazine. In 1964, it maintained a booth in the Hall of Education at the New York World Fair where literature both about the Society and about Judaism could be obtained and where questions about Judaism were answered. Thus far, the Society enjoys a rather limited fame and influence. Its achievements to this point are attributable mainly to the truly Maccabean zeal of its founder. It has the potential of becoming

an important national organization, if branches were to be organized in every major Jewish community and rabbis and laymen from all parts of the country were to share in the Society's leadership, planning and program.

These "stirrings of the heart" have not been confined entirely to Reform and Conservative Jews who represent the more liberal interpretations of Judaism. There is also evidence of a desire on the part of some Orthodox Jews to approach this area of common concern more affirmatively. The reluctance of the most tradition-bound of all the groups to encourage conversion or even to receive converts has been noted by all recent commentators on Talmudic law. To hasten unduly the coming of the Messianic era, when all mankind will accept the teachings of Judaism, is regarded as sinful by most Orthodox Jews.

Nevertheless Orthodox Judaism has responded to the demands of modern life and has begun to deal positively with the question of proselytism, especially as it is related to new developments within the State of Israel. The problem has arisen with special urgency in connection with non-Jewish wives of Jewish immigrants to the new state. That the fulfillment of the Zionist dream is a prelude to the fulfillment of the Messianic hope has been, for most rabbinic authorities, an inseparable part of Jewish religious tradition and aspiration. Thus Conservative Rabbi Israel H. Levinthal writes

Zionism may be regarded as the modern garb of the old Messianic hope, which kept the Jews alive through the ages past. It, too, has the two-fold function preached by the prophets. It aims to restore the Jew to his national life in his native land, Palestine; it aims, too, through a regenerated Israel, to help bring about the regeneration of all mankind.

There is little wonder, then, that in the State of Israel the problem of conversion should arise. "Should Jews Missionize Christians and Moslems?" was the title of a symposium in 1956 in the Israeli magazine *Machanayim*, a publication distributed among the Armed Forces personnel by the Israeli military chaplains. Rabbi J. L. Maimon and the secular scholar, Dr. Benjamin Mazar, declared that the establishment of missions is contrary to

the spirit of Judaism. Furthermore, it would be contrary to the best interests of the Jewish people who are striving to establish friendly co-operation with their neighbors of other religions. They also felt that a greater readiness to accept proselytes might disturb the integrity of the Jewish religious way of life. On the other hand, Rabbi S. I. Zeivin and the distinguished scholar, Dr. Joseph Klausner, insisted that all the problems suggested by Rabbi Maimon and Professor Mazar could find their natural solutions in future generations. Living a normal national life in their own state, Jews of the future could be counted upon to solve their problems, even those arising from active proselytization.

Commenting on this symposium in an editorial in her magazine *The Jewish Spectator* in October, 1956, Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, an unusual woman with a deep knowledge of Jewish tradition, expressed her agreement with Rabbi Zeivin and Professor Klausner. Bible and Talmud speak approvingly of the acceptance of converts. The modern Jewish community in Israel and elsewhere can be trusted not "to stoop to soul-catching techniques and methods"

Jews who are convinced that Judaism is the best road to the good life and the surest path to the better future-to-come of universal peace and righteousness will be eager to share their insights and beliefs with their fellow men, especially in the Jewish setting of the State of Israel, where the proselyte has the opportunity to become fully integrated with the people of his choice.

Isolation was forced upon Jews, wrote Dr. Rosmarin, but now a new day has come. "As in days of old we must go out and 'win souls' and join their future to our own future and to the future of mankind as our Jewish tradition envisions it."

The State of Israel already has a well organized society of an avowedly missionary nature. This is *Ha-Agudah L'maan Gerey Tzedek b'Yisrael U'va-Olam*, The World Union for the Propagation of Judaism, established in 1956. The society has the approval of the Israeli government. Its chairman is Dr. Israel Ben-Zeev, head of the Arab schools in Israel and a professor at Bar Ilan University. Its secretary is Rabbi Israel Lapid. Rabbi Lapid was

the private secretary of the late Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi, Isaac Herzog. Although the Agudah hopes eventually to set up a world-wide missionary organization, its primary function at the present time is to give assistance to converts in the State of Israel by helping them solve their many problems. The society is also concerned with preparing Noachides and in bringing people to an understanding of Judaism, with the ultimate aim of winning them to Judaism itself.

In *Jewish Social Studies* for October, 1954, Dr. Eichhorn published the results of his survey of "Conversions to Judaism by American Reform and Conservative Rabbis." This survey indicated that the American Reform rabbinate is currently receiving between one thousand and twelve hundred converts each year and the Conservative rabbinate between five hundred and five hundred fifty. Since the number of American Orthodox rabbis is far in excess of the combined total of the Reform and Conservative rabbis, Dr. Eichhorn assumed that a minimum of five hundred converts are being admitted annually under Orthodox auspices. On the basis of this study, it is reasonable to suppose that more than two thousand non-Jews are now being converted to Judaism each year in the United States.

On the basis of the rabbinical responses to other questions sent to every American Reform and Conservative congregational rabbi, Dr. Eichhorn presented the following additional findings: The average length of the instruction period of the candidate for conversion is four months. The converts are overwhelmingly female, about five females to every male. In ninety-five per cent of the cases, either an impending or existing marriage to a Jewish person is involved. Despite the fact that most conversions presently occurring are linked to marriage, "the rabbis agree that most of these converts are at least as good Jews as born Jews and, in many cases, much better."

Dr. Eichhorn ended his article with these words

In the opinion of most of the 785 rabbis who participated in this study, these proselytes constitute a valuable spiritual asset to Judaism and the American Jewish community. They challenge the Jews to be

more worthy of their spiritual heritage. They are a constant reminder of the modern Jew's neglected obligation to share this heritage more unselfishly with those who are dissatisfied with the faiths of their fathers and who are yearning for a more meaningful explanation of human existence and a more satisfying way of life.

On March 12, 1958, the usually reliable *New York Times* published a dispatch from Jerusalem which stirred up considerable interest in both the Jewish and general communities. It stated that eight thousand Japanese had converted to Judaism and had organized themselves into a Union of Jewish Japanese. It reported that these Japanese Jews have their own synagogues, speak only Hebrew among themselves and are preparing to migrate to Israel. The dispatch stated that, by 1968, Israel might receive as many as one hundred thousand such Japanese immigrants.

Despite all the interest and excitement which the story aroused, it was quickly and thoroughly disproved. The truth is only that, since World War II, there is a growing number of Japanese intellectuals, primarily university professors and students, who are interested in learning more about Judaism. After making an on-the-spot investigation of this situation, Dr. Eichhorn wrote, in the *Jewish Spectator* for June, 1958

The intelligent college educated Oriental is in revolt against the notion of intellectual regimentation and rigid conformity which he associates with the word "conversion." He wants freedom to study, to learn and to choose. He is amused by the multiplicity of Christian missionary enterprises in Japan, each maintaining that it has "the" truth and that its competitors teach false doctrines. After four centuries of intensive Christian missionary effort, only three hundred thousand of ninety million Japanese are Christians. Any ever so well intentioned individual or organization that will come to Japan for the purpose of telling the Japanese that Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or any other denominational brand of Judaism has "the" truth might just as well stay home. The intelligent Japanese simply will not listen to this kind of partisan talk. He has been hearing it from the Christians for four hundred years; and he is tired of it. . . . What is desired by all the Japanese with whom I discussed this matter, without a single exception, is an Information Center in Tokyo, where Japanese may learn about Jews and Judaism. . . .

The younger generation of educated Japanese is spiritually restless. The religions of their fathers have lost out because they were tied to chauvinistic nationalism, the barbarism of war and the bitterness of defeat. The mechanized creature comforts of Western civilization are

alluring, but the materialistic theologies and philosophies of the West are not. Neither Christianity nor Communism holds any attraction for the Japanese intellectual. They are Occidental. He is an Oriental. Judaism is different. Judaism is an Oriental religion which has been "marking time" in the Occident for more than fifteen hundred years. Perhaps through the rebirth of the State of Israel and through the dedicated efforts of Jews throughout the world, Judaism will, at long last, "come home."

The American Jewish military chaplains who have served in Japan since the Second World War have been responsible, in very large measure, for the increased interest of many Japanese in Judaism. The most active of these rabbis has been Rabbi Milton Rosen of Chicago, who, after completing his tour as a military chaplain, has continued to live in Japan and to teach Judaism to all who wish to listen and to learn. Among the early disciples whom he acquired were Mr. Hiroshi Okamoto, an instructor in English in a Japanese high school, and Miss Kyoko Sato, who worked first for the American military library service in northern Japan and then for the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. Brought together by their common interest in Judaism, Hiroshi and Kyoko's friendship ripened into love and they became Mr. and Mrs. Okamoto. Mr. Okamoto decided to study the Jewish religion as intensively as possible. He applied for admission to the Hebrew Union College and was accepted, although, at this time, neither he nor his wife had been formally converted to Judaism. Three years later, they were converted in Cincinnati in a strictly traditional manner so that none might ever say in the years to come that, because the Okamotos are Reform Jews, they really are not Jews in the fullest sense. Hiroshi Okamoto received rabbinical ordination from Dr. Nelson Glueck and the HUC faculty in June, 1964. He and his wife have returned to Japan where they hope to establish a Jewish Information Center in that section of Tokyo which contains the three leading universities of the city. While this Center will not engage in overt missionizing activities, it is possible that, over the years, individual Japanese will voluntarily seek admission to our religious fellowship because of what they learn in Rabbi Okamoto's Tokyo Jewish Information Center.

With regard to the benefits which might be derived from a missionary movement in the United States, it is interesting to note the comment by Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, professor of history at the Hebrew Union College, in *The Future of American Jewry*, published in 1956: "The thousands of Gentile converts who annually marry into Judaism will all the more produce an American Jew who is ethnically and anthropologically not different from his next door neighbor." Others go even further. They believe that the thousands who marry into Judaism and the perhaps tens of thousands who will voluntarily accept the faith out of pure conviction will find spiritual satisfaction in and will give spiritual strength to this ancient religion and will stimulate it to ever greater spiritual creativity.

Out of the bloody nightmare of Hitlerism emerged the fulfillment of an age-old dream, the establishment of the State of Israel, a free people in a free land, one step closer the day when all mankind will live as free men, "each under his own vine and his own fig tree, with none to make him afraid." Perhaps the next step on the destined journey is for the Jewish people everywhere to bring to all who will listen the spiritual message which it possesses and to hold out the hand of invitation and of full fellowship to all who will accept. Perhaps the lines written by Robert Browning about a century ago were more than just the words of a poet; perhaps they were the words of a prophet

The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
And again in his border see Israel set.
When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
The stranger-seed shall be joined to them;
To Jacob's house shall the Gentiles cleave.
So the Prophet saith and so his sons believe.

CHAPTER SIX

CONVERSION TO JUDAISM: THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

by

BERNARD J. BAMBERGER

There have been two conventional approaches to the subject of religious conversion.

One is the attitude of the believer: My religion is the only true religion, or at least the only complete and perfect version of the true religion. It is therefore my clear duty to bring the truth to those who hold other beliefs or no belief, and to use every means of persuading them to adopt the genuine faith. Some extremists have even deemed force appropriate for this sacred purpose. Conversely, one who leaves the true religion for any other is labeled an apostate; his defection is to be sorely lamented, if not condemned and punished.

The second viewpoint may be praised as liberal or frowned upon as skeptical. It assumes that all religions are much the same, and that nothing is gained when an individual leaves the church in which he has been reared to enter some other. It suspects converts of insincerity or emotional instability and missionaries of fanaticism.

Historic Judaism has not held either of these positions. It has certainly claimed to be the one true revelation. It has likewise condemned Jews who adopted any other faith. In former centuries, too, the spokesmen of Judaism sought converts, but they were not driven by the same urgency that spurred the missionaries of other religions. This is because they did not believe—and Judaism has never taught—that one must be a Jew in order to be

"saved." According to rabbinic theory, the belief in one God, the rejection of idol worship and the practice of the moral law are incumbent on all men. The complete system of Jewish doctrine and practice is binding only on those who are born Jews. Gentiles who wish to enter the Jewish community have the right to do so and, upon doing so, must assume all the duties of the faithful Jew. But the unconverted Gentile may serve God outside the Jewish fold and be assured that a righteous life will win him "a share in the world to come."

This traditional view of the matter is still the theoretical position of most Jewish religious leaders. In practice, they have not implemented it as did their predecessors two thousand years ago. Instead of seeking converts, most modern rabbis have generally discouraged them. One crusty teacher of the last century argued bluntly that no converts whatever should be admitted; for, said he, anyone who wants to become a Jew in these days must be either insincere or unbalanced! This extreme position is exceptional; yet there has been a general reluctance to receive converts, all the more since many candidates are planning to marry Jews and the sincerity of their conversion is open to question.

Thus we find a double paradox. The orthodox Jew, who regards his religion as literally *the* God-given truth, takes a stand toward missionary endeavor much like that of the skeptic, who views all religions with equal indifference. Whereas among Christians it is the fundamentalists who are most eager to proselytize, it is primarily in the liberal camp that Jews have begun to call for a new missionary effort.

It is necessary therefore to review the whole subject from the standpoint of basic theological concepts. Do the teachings of Judaism logically lead to a missionary program, do they preclude it, or do they have no necessary connection with such a proposal? What, moreover, does Judaism have to offer the Gentile world? Finally, what is supposed to happen, in inward religious terms, when a non-Jew formally adopts Judaism?

I

Every individual strives to preserve and enhance his personal life, but also seeks to relate himself in affection and usefulness to others. Every social grouping has an analogous urge for self-perpetuation and tries to bind its members together by ties of loyalty and mutual aid; but it usually wants to make some contribution to the larger welfare as well. These familiar realities are the background of the much discussed topic: Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism. These two elements are interwoven in the history of every national, cultural or religious society. In Judaism they have been modified by two significant factors.

On the one hand, normal group self-consciousness and pride have been intensified by the tragedies and uncertainties of Jewish history. Just because Jewish survival was so often in doubt, just because the Jews had to bear the double burden of political impotence and humiliating contempt, their literature has emphasized the importance of their heritage and the certain assurance of future vindication, and has dwelt now on the virtues and merits of the group and now with drastic severity upon its faults.

On the other hand, it is precisely the explicit universalism of Jewish doctrine that has set off the particularistic utterances in such striking contrast and has led some observers to suppose that the two tendencies are fundamentally in conflict. This is not the case. The urge for individual self-preservation is not necessarily anti-social. Nor can the relative strength and importance of the two trends be estimated by assembling the universalistic statements of the Talmud, for example, and balancing them numerically against nationalistic or tribalistic remarks.

A more constructive method is to inquire: What sentiments are uniquely, or, at least, typically, characteristic of Jewish literature, and what sentiments does this literature hold in common with those of contemporary cultures? Such inquiry will elicit abundant evidence that national assertiveness is a commonplace in the writings of all ancient—and modern—peoples; it will be discovered that the distinguishing features of the Bible and the

Talmud are their universal theology and their humanitarian vision.

To this we must add another question which has bemused the minds of students for centuries: Why did Israel survive as a vital force in the world when the other small peoples of western Asia disappeared from history? An examination of the facts leads to an inescapable conclusion: It was the prophetic and, later, the Pharisaic faith, with their strong universal emphases, which gave the Jewish people the will and the rationale to survive.

What are these universal emphases?

First, clearly, the belief in one God, the sole Creator, the absolute Ruler, the constant Preserver of the universe, Who is at the same time the Father and Teacher of all men. We need not stop here to inquire whether monotheism had been anticipated by Ikhnaton or whether it was discovered independently by the philosophers and tragic poets of Greece. It is enough to say that the Hebrew Bible enunciates the doctrine in such certain and emphatic terms as are found nowhere else, and that it is through the Bible and the living tradition of the Jewish people that the Christian and Muslim worlds learned to worship one God.

Bound up with the belief in the universal God is the concept of humanity—of mankind as one. It is implied in the very first chapter of the Bible, which declares that all men are of the same stock, in contradistinction to many ancient and modern myths about superior and inferior races. The concept of humanity is made explicit in the Scriptural insistence that all men must be equal before the law and in the prophetic contention that all peoples must accept the same basic moral standards—standards that must be practiced in dealing with all peoples. The doctrine reaches its climactic development in a vision of universal peace and brotherhood, to be achieved through the recognition of the one God and through obedience to His Torah, which shall go forth to mankind from Zion.

The message of a universal God, of a universal law, and of a humanity that is already one in essence and in the end of days shall become one in actual brotherhood—this message could not remain the exclusive possession of one nation without hopeless

contradiction. One who believes in humanity cannot become an isolationist and retire behind iron walls to enjoy the splendid humanitarian vision in cloistered exclusiveness. As other contributors to this volume have shown, the teachers of Judaism have made repeated attempts to implement these universal doctrines by widening the community that cherishes them.

What about the belief in "the chosen people?" Does not this restrictive doctrine negate the universal claims of Judaism? We have already referred to the many "particularistic" statements to be found in Jewish literature. It must be said frankly that some of these are expressions of that cruder chauvinism from which no age or people is free. (One shudders to think of the flagrantly un-American sentiments which misguided or unprincipled patrioters have inserted into the *Congressional Record*!) Other seemingly narrow, nationalistic utterances are frequently no more than outcries of pain from a people suffering physical persecution and spiritual humiliation. Allowance must also be made for the abrupt, black-and-white style of many Talmudic statements: The virtue under discussion is man's highest duty and the corresponding vice his vilest weakness.

From scattered remarks of this sort, no conclusions can be drawn about basic Jewish beliefs. In our classical literature, serious discussions concerning the election of Israel indicate that the main current of tradition is very definitely universalistic. In His wisdom, God chose Israel for His service. Different Biblical and post-Biblical writers approach this subject in different ways. Some accept the choice of Israel as a fact, without attempting to explain it. Others, from the prophets onward, are convinced that God chose Israel as the instrument through which mankind is to be reconciled with Him. He has called Israel to be the agent of enlightenment and freedom, to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Their dispersion among the nations, according to one teacher of the third century of the current era, was providentially ordained that they might have a greater opportunity to win proselytes.

Judah Halevi, the medieval poet-philosopher, an extreme par-

ticularist in his emphasis on the unique qualities of the land and people of Israel, characterizes the Jewish people as the heart of the world. As the entire body suffers if the heart is diseased, so mankind as a whole suffers because the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel from its land have disrupted the channels of communication between God and His world. This mystical conception was carried to further extremes in the later Kabbalah, which views the exile and the future redemption in cosmic rather than in national terms, since God's Spirit is in exile with Israel. For the Kabbalist, the Messianic dawn will herald not only political independence for the Jews but redemption of the whole world from evil.

The teachings summarized in the preceding paragraphs never were hardened into official dogma. They are cited only as evidence that the doctrine of the chosen people has always been integrated with a concern for all mankind. This doctrine in no way affirms the inherent superiority of born Jews; it is not a charter of special privilege, still less a license to exploit or conquer other peoples. On the contrary, Biblical and later writers insist that God's special concern with the Israelites imposes a greater obligation on them and leads Him to judge them the more severely. But, above all, it must be understood that the community of Israel is not a closed corporation. It is taken for granted that the duties of Judaism fall automatically on the born Jew and that the Jew who rejects this responsibility is a traitor and apostate. The non-Jew, however, who voluntarily assumes this responsibility becomes, in so doing, an integral part of the Congregation of Israel. As has been stated in another chapter, the completeness of this acceptance has been made a part of Jewish statutory law: The Gentile who adopts Judaism and later abandons it does not revert to the status of an unconverted heathen; legally he is regarded as an apostate Jew. Jewish affiliation is not a matter of racial origin.

The Gentile has the opportunity but not the obligation to embrace Judaism. What is required of him is simply the recognition of the universal God and the practice of the moral law—in traditional terms, obedience to "the commandments given to the sons

of Noah." Though liberal and traditional Judaism differ sharply in the demands they make upon the professing Jew, they agree fully as to the requirements which Judaism makes of those outside the Jewish community.

It follows that new members should not be lightly and casually received into a community which regards itself as designated for a special arduous service and which, in plain fact, has had to endure painful and sometimes tragic disabilities. The candidate for conversion must be warned of the difficult consequences that may follow such a step and he may properly be required to meet some well defined requirements for admission. This does not mean that high walls, to be breached only by the most persistent applicant, should be erected against potential converts.

Indeed Judaism aims at a grander objective than the enrollment of erstwhile Gentiles into synagogue membership. It seeks to win all mankind for God and to establish His kingdom of universal righteousness and peace. But such an ultimate objective has to be approached by some present and practical means. It cannot be furthered, as some misguided enthusiasts have proposed, by the assimilation of the Jewish group into an undifferentiated "mankind," any more than the ocean waters may be made sweet by dissolving even a very large amount of sugar in the central Pacific. On the other hand, a rigid isolationism is also certainly not the answer. Indeed, the ultimate universal objectives become mere empty rhetoric unless Jews are prepared to welcome and even to seek out those who are ready, potentially at least, for participation in the great spiritual destiny of the Jewish people. This conclusion was clearly drawn across the face of Jewish history more than two thousand years ago. It is only because external and uncontrollable forces checked the missionary effort of Judaism that the matter has to be reargued now.

II

Granting that the fundamental beliefs of Judaism imply a positive attitude toward missionizing, one may still ask: What does

Judaism have to offer to the interested Gentile?

We may, here and now, eliminate one motive which sometimes attracts the unaffiliated to religion or draws a questing individual from one denomination to another—the demand for theological certainty about life after death. This was the great appeal of the mystery cults in the Hellenistic world. The Christian churches have laid primary stress on the assurance of eternal bliss for the believer and often on the promise of joyous reunion with one's beloved dead beyond the grave.

He whose soul is burdened by fear or torn by bereavement and who therefore seeks assurance on this score is likely to respond most warmly to those whose promises are categorical, confident, specific and soporific. Such a person is not likely to turn to Judaism. For while most Jews in the last two thousand years have held some kind of belief in some kind of immortality, and while this belief is positively affirmed in the traditional prayers, the doctrine has never been standardized. Some of our teachers have depicted the future life in concrete terms of physical resurrection or of a Paradise and a Gehinnom. Others of the past and present have spoken of a more generalized and philosophic kind of immortality which does not necessarily require the survival and continuity of the individual consciousness.

More important than this, however, is the hard fact that attainment of eternal salvation for the individual is not the central objective of Judaism. Judaism insists that the will of God must be obeyed for its own sake and not for any ulterior motive, however spiritual. From the standpoint of Jewish theology, the obligation to fulfill the commandments of the Torah would be no less binding even if man were certain that he will experience no life beyond this one. The prospective convert to Judaism is not required to abandon the hope of immortality—on the contrary, our liturgy encourages him to cherish that hope—but he is not offered a definite and detailed blueprint of an assured future eternal life.

What, then, is the spiritual inducement that he is given?

Many people believe in a more or less rationalistic theism and in the supremacy of the moral law. These are certainly important

elements of Judaism, but they are no longer peculiar to Judaism. Unitarians and others who maintain these tenets are not classified as Jews. The formal convert to Judaism is likely to be a person who adopts Judaism because he already believes in these fundamentals; the act of conversion derives not from the discovery of new religious truth but from some other consideration. What is it?

Though classical Jewish theology, properly interpreted and explained, is both reasonable and ethical, Judaism is not just Unitarianism with ceremonials. It is not just a cool rationalism. Judaism is a continuing experience, the earliest and decisive stages of which are recorded in the Hebrew Bible. In Judaism there is fire and heat. From the human side, it appears as a dedicated faith and a passion for righteousness, sealed many times by martyrdom. From the divine side, it appears as revelation, as the bursting forth of a truth that has changed the lives of men and transformed the history of the world, as the word which is like fire, as a spiritual hammer that splits the rock of human indifference. Whether we interpret revelation in traditional or modernist terms, the fact of revelation is engraved upon the heart of Judaism in letters that burn and glow. It is because of all this that Judaism has an appeal for many who have rejected the complicated, irrational fundamentalist doctrines in which they have been reared, but find the liberal churches too chilly to serve as a spiritual home.

To be a Jew is to be more than just an ethical monotheist; it is to belong to a community which has experienced the revelation of the One God, a community which has lived and worked and suffered and died to fulfill His purpose in the world, a community which has followed a unique path in history because it has dedicated itself to Him. The person who voluntarily adopts Judaism is not only assenting to certain metaphysical propositions and assuming certain ethical responsibilities. He is entering into membership in a community which is different from every other community on the face of the earth.

The uniqueness of the Jewish community is often undertood better by the sympathetic Gentile than by many a Jew. Witness the wearisome wrangle among some Jews as to whether we con-

Jews and then to love Judaism.

It has been the experience of many rabbis that a large proportion of those who come to Judaism by such a route are happy and enthusiastic in the practice of their new religion. Judaism is reasonable and non-dogmatic, but it is not abstract nor unimpassioned. Rooted in long historic experience, it is a religion of intense convictions, prophetic ideals and vivid observances. Its forms of worship have not been improvised or synthesized by intellectuals, but have grown organically out of the deep experience of the community. It may be surprising to some Jews to discover that frequently the specifically Hebraic elements of the Jewish heritage have a strong appeal for persons who did not grow up in the Jewish tradition. While many converts turn to Reform Judaism, in which both admission to the Jewish fold and the practice of Judaism thereafter are not so rigidly bound up with ritual requirements, not a few converts find it quite possible to undertake a more rigorous discipline of traditional observance and soon become thoroughly at home in it.

III

Finally, how are we to understand the process of conversion?

Judaism does not have sacraments. It does not ascribe supernatural effects to any ceremony. The Talmud states that, at the moment of ritual immersion which constitutes the decisive act of conversion, the convert becomes spiritually a new person. This observation, however, never became an officially binding doctrine. We can explain the situation best by an analogy with marriage, which Christianity regards as a sacrament while Judaism takes a different approach. In our tradition, marriage has a double aspect. It is a legal contract, involving a change of status on the part of bride and groom. It is also the ratification of a relationship of the highest ethical and religious significance. Therefore the legal formalities are combined with solemn prayers and, as a rule, with words of counsel and encouragement. And suitable festivities accompany the event.

Conversion likewise involves a change of status. Even in the American environment, where church and state are separate and where sanctions cannot be invoked to enforce Jewish law, the act of conversion is no empty formality. Once the convert has followed the approved procedure, he is eligible for membership in a synagogue and has the right to be buried in a Jewish cemetery; if he requires social service help, he properly applies to a Jewish agency; in the armed forces he wears a "J" on his dog-tag. Such a change of status must be signaled by a formal act. The convert receives documentary evidence of his entrance into the Jewish community and the event is duly recorded in the files of the officiating rabbi.

But along with this formal change there must also be a deep spiritual commitment. There is a stirring declaration of loyalty to the Jewish group and to the Jewish faith. The ceremony of conversion—whether following the traditional law or in modernist form—should be and often is conducted in such a way as to inspire and encourage the convert to draw spiritual joy from the fountains of the Jewish spirit and to impart added spiritual strength to the Jewish community. He who comes to us in this way and in this mood receives a sincere and cordial welcome.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONVERSION TO JUDAISM: PSYCHOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

by

ABRAHAM N. FRANZBLAU

It is not a simple thing to explore the dynamics and logistics of conversion, for conversion is a complex phenomenon presenting many facets. It may be not only of the inter-religious type that we commonly think of, where a person converts from one religion to another, but it may also be of the intra-religious type. In the Christian religion, for example, we not only find non-Christians who become converts to Christianity, but also good Christians who, while remaining within their original denomination, undergo a religious "conversion" which they testify to be a unique experience unlike any other in their prior religious life. Both before and after the "conversion," they believed in Jesus and his saving power. But, having now at last fully "accepted Christ," they feel a phenomenal change in their outlook and attitudes. They are suffused with at-oneness with their Savior and freedom from sin, and they move in a mood of exultation, sublimely confident that they have been "saved." They become, in the metaphor of William James, "twice-born souls."

INTRA-RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

It may be instructive to explore the dynamics and logistics of this intra-religious type of conversion experience before going on to the other type. By dynamics, in our sense, is meant the study of the laws governing motion, and its causes and effects. By logistics is meant the practical details involved in accomplishing

motion. Using military strategy as an example, the dynamics would relate to why, where and how a campaign is mounted and the objectives it would hope to achieve. The logistics would be concerned with bringing the required food, ammunition and materiel to a specified locale at specified times in specified quantities.

In the typical intra-religious Christian conversion experience, the psychological dynamics and logistics appear to follow a rather clear-cut pattern. Feelings of weakness, unworthiness and inferiority, and the guilt feelings which inevitably accompany them, are indigenous to the soil of human infancy and childhood. Equally indigenous is the counteracting mechanism, a fantasy of omnipotence, which is harbored universally during these years. Between the two, we are enabled, mercifully, to maintain our balance. Both are given up as the growing individual acquires a sense of potency from experiencing success in his life activities.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION

Dynamically, the background for the conversion experience is found in the harnessing of both the self-deprecatory feelings and the omnipotence fantasy to a two-pronged religious hypothesis—first, that sinfulness is the natural state of man and dooms him to eternal damnation, and second, that redemption can come only through Christ. It is evident that acceptance of the first hypothesis prolongs and builds up guilt tensions ecclesiogenically, that is, wholly and solely through church teachings. An individual may carry a great burden of ecclesiogenic guilt regardless of exemplary ethical and moral behavior. Starbuck, in his *Psychology of Religion*, points out how this may be a retarding factor in character formation

Conversion is a process of struggling away from sin, rather than of striving toward righteousness.

The exultant feeling of being "saved," like the feeling of guilt which preceded it, is also ecclesiogenic, that is, it grows wholly and solely out of church teachings. It derives its power from un-

resolved residuals of the infantile omnipotence fantasy. It is somewhat akin to the phenomenal exultation accompanying the feeling of being "in love," which I have traced to the same source in *The Road to Sexual Maturity*, Chapter IV, "Why Cupid is an Infant."

Acceptance of the first hypothesis, about the sinfulness of man, leads to depression and despair. Acceptance of the second hypothesis, about the saving power of Jesus, leads to exultation and release. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James says

There is a certain uniform deliverance in which all religions appear to meet. It consists of two parts: an uneasiness; and its solution.

This summarizes the dynamics correctly and agrees completely with the psychoanalytic findings.

LOGISTICS OF INTRA-RELIGIOUS "CONVERSION"

The logistics of this type of conversion experience requires, first, wide-spread dissemination and acceptance of the basic hypotheses, and, second, a catalyst or trigger-mechanism to evoke the experience. The first is accomplished by the educational and devotional work of the church. The second is accomplished ordinarily, though not exclusively, through the medium of the "revival meeting." This may be a small venture conducted by a local minister or it may be a large-scale enterprise conducted by a famous evangelist in a convention hall and heralded by a full blast of publicity. In the latter, the number who "accept Christ" may reach into the thousands. Groups like the "Holy Rollers" require these evangelistic proceedings to bring them to a state resembling mass frenzy.

Clearly, if the dynamics of the process are not applicable, the logistics will fail. Non-believers remain unmoved. In Franz Werfel's *Song of Bernadette*, Lafite says: "There are no conversions to belief. There is only a return to it." The term "conversion" should therefore be confined to those instances in which an individual changes his religious beliefs and practices from those

of one faith to those of another. Such a person is usually regarded as an apostate or a renegade by the faith which he has left. This also rules out use of the term to describe the easy shifts from one Protestant denomination to another, shifts which are accomplished without marked emotion or alteration of belief and practice.

In examining the dynamics of true conversion, let us first look into the question of how religious belief and disbelief came to be in the first place. What led to the formulation of religion and its various hypotheses? How did these formulations come to be accepted? What major changes have taken place in man's religious ideas over the ages? How reasonable and acceptable are religions as they exist today? Why do some people, who were once believers, become heretics or shift to another faith? If we are to understand the dynamics and logistics of conversion, especially as these relate to Judaism, the answers to these questions may be important.

FREUD'S VIEWS OF THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION

Freud has suggested that there are three basic reasons why religion evolves. First, Nature is cruel and capricious, showing man no favor. He must battle for his existence or perish. If the benevolent or malevolent forces in his environment become personified as deities, he can attribute the praise or blame for successes, windfalls, failures and disasters to them alone, and he can propitiate the malevolent deities and flatter those that are benevolent, with the conviction that he is thereby averting evil and attracting good. In addition, by peopling the universe with gods, even though some of them are conceived as hostile, man does not feel so alone.

Second, as far as man can possibly know, death is the inescapable end of life. There is no shred of evidence to the contrary. But this, man cannot bring himself to accept, so he invents immortality and the hereafter as a means of thwarting the inexorable and equalizing the inexplicable inequities of life. The gods whom he has invented he appoints as keepers of the accounts which will consign him to some kind of Heaven or Hell.

Third, man cannot face the hazards of living all by himself. He

stitute a racial, national, cultural or religious entity. Call us what you will, by tradition and on the pages of history, the Jewish people is a dedicated fellowship of men and women who have been summoned to minister to mankind in the name of God. The actual performance of many, perhaps most, Jews does not measure up to the loftiness of the definition. The ancient prophet describes Israel as God's chosen servant who is to be "a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon"; and in the same chapter he laments, "Who is blind as My servant or deaf as the messenger whom I send?"

The all too plain refusal on the part of many Jews to accept the quality of their own uniqueness underscores the need for Judaism to become a missionary faith. Historical circumstance has distorted the character of Jewish identity. The socio-ethnic structure has become hypertrophied as the living grasp on spiritual values has weakened. Obviously, there can be no Judaism without a Jewish people; souls are not found on this earth without bodies to contain them. But today we face a phenomenon of a different sort: We have an abundance of Jews without Judaism. In this regard, secular Jewish nationalism is not the most dangerous heresy, though it is interesting to note that many a stalwart Zionist has been worrying about spiritual values since the Jewish state became a reality. What is much more alarming is the extent to which, in the United States, Jewish identity has become a matter of social grouping almost devoid of significant spiritual content. This situation relates not only to Jewish country clubs and resort hotels; even synagogues are tending to become institutions of community recreation with vestigial religious functions sandwiched in between the club meeting and the Saturday night frolic.

The entrance into the Jewish community of individuals who are Jews by choice rather than by accident of birth and who have become Jews by means of a specifically religious act could serve as a wholesome and stirring challenge to the indifferent and complacent. Here will be Jews who are not Jews because of the compulsion of birth or because they are comfortable in the prevailing Jewish social milieu or because of a sentimental attachment to

ancestral mores and cookery. Free of the psychological complexities and the emotional conflicts that confuse and disturb even some loyal Jews, converts serve to remind all other Jews of the essentially religious character of their way of life and the uniqueness of Jewish destiny.

If this be the present condition of Jewry, why should a Gentile give up his own religious background to enter a community so largely indifferent to its own spiritual heritage? The answer is not only that the outsider often appreciates what the insider takes for granted; the rest of the answer is that, while Jewish life is admittedly far from perfect, it does have many positive and admirable aspects. Some of these have been pointed out repeatedly by non-Jewish admirers of Jewish group life: Family solidarity, philanthropy, sobriety, emphasis on learning.

The writer once received as a convert a young woman who was married to a Jew and had been warmly accepted by his family. They were no longer living in his home city and there were no outside pressures upon her to become a Jewess. The step was dictated by her desire to have a religious home and by the conviction that membership in the Synagogue would meet her religious needs.

Her story was interesting. She came from a small town where she had been socially out of place. The boys and girls with whom she had grown up regarded an interest in serious books or good music as offensively highbrow and probably an affectation. So she left the small town, secured employment in a large city, and looked for associations in the kinds of groups where her cultural tastes would not be resented. She found that many young Jews shared her same interests; and she gradually drifted into a social environment which was almost completely Jewish. She was never made consciously aware of any religious differences; it was only after she had married a Jew that she confronted the religious issue. Her husband and his parents showed little concern for Judaism; but, as she became more and more acquainted with its teachings, she found that these teachings satisfied her spiritual needs. She became a convert because she had first learned to like

needs the help of his fellow men. But to gain this he must yield some of his own pleasures which are in conflict with theirs. This is the price he must pay for the benefits of civilization, however much he may resent it. Since the strong might take advantage of their strength and oppress the weak, the basic commandments of communal living are given divine origin and sanction. The likelihood of obedience is thus enhanced, with the result that the strong are controlled and the weak protected. Besides, obedience to his deity and the divine commands gives primitive man the feeling of "being good" and therefore of earning divine favor, as he earned parental favor in childhood.

RELIGION: THE "NEUROSIS OF HUMANITY"

Thus, to Freud, religion is a neurotic substitute for a mature resolution of the problems and conflicts of living. He feels that religion is the "universal obsessional neurosis of humanity." This neurosis, "like the child's, originated in the Oedipus Complex, the relation to the father." Man, like a child who knows "he can never do without protection against unknown and mighty powers, invests these with the traits of the father figure . . . and creates for himself the gods, of whom he is afraid, whom he seeks to propitiate, and to whom he nevertheless entrusts the task of protecting him." Ernest Jones, in his *Essays*, puts this point of view succinctly

The religious life represents a dramatization on a cosmic plane of the emotions, fears and longings which arose in the child's relations to his parents.

Freud was a keen though critical student of religion; hence his contributions cannot be dismissed lightly. If, as he maintains, religion has no sound basis, then, from our point of view, the dynamics and logistics of conversion become essentially irrelevant and cannot be discussed with integrity as a guide. The truth is that, among the primitive religions, we find almost complete confirmation of his formulations. The primitive deities are the personification of the benevolent and malevolent forces of their environment, and primitive religion consists mainly of the propitiation

or flattery of these deities. The after-life, as they conceive it, is largely a continuation of their earthly pattern of existence, with the pain subtracted and the pleasure multiplied. Communal behavior, motivated and controlled by divine injunction, is interpreted for the masses by highly privileged, consecrated representatives of the gods. To proceed with even the simplest functions without consulting the will of the gods is to risk disaster. Since disaster was the constant companion of man before civilization multiplied his defenses, the sway of the religious functionary was great.

THE ROLE OF SEX IN PRIMITIVE RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

The psychoanalytic study of religion has also shown us the large role played by sex in primitive religious belief and ritual, epitomized in the primitive puberty rites, which are almost identical everywhere in form and content. The privilege of sex is granted by the elders, provided the taboos of the community (especially those relating to incest) are accepted by the initiates. The solemn and mettle-testing rituals marking the initiation of the young adults into the community of their elders were usually climaxed by wildly orgiastic rites. The mixture of the sacred and the sexual, which we find so crudely expressed here, is also characteristic of many of the later religions. Sacred prostitution, as one example, played a large role in some of the ancient religions. Various actual or symbolic castration ceremonials were practiced in others. The priests of Cybele, often self-castrated, would hold a recurrent festival in which, on the third day, Attis, the son of the goddess, who had died, is brought to life again through the ministrations and intercession of his mother. In the Egyptian religion, similarly, Isis periodically restores Serapis-Osiris to life. In Mithraism, the young son-god opposes and finally slays the father and becomes the master of his own fate. Also, in the Greek and Roman religions we find the human sexual conflict intertwined with the relations which the gods reflect in their behavior, relations which are often abhorrent to our sense of morality.

OEDIPAL ELEMENTS IN CHRISTIANITY

Christianity represents, in many ways, a compromise between primitive and more advanced religious concepts. The central theme of Christianity that Jesus is God's only-begotten son, who came to earth in the flesh to take upon himself man's sins and atone for them by his death upon the cross, after which he was buried, resurrected and returned to Heaven, contains primitive elements present in earlier religions hundreds of years before the birth of Christianity. The myth of a son born of a divine being and a human and who dies and is reborn occurs again and again in early literature. In the Vedic literature, more than five thousand years old, there is an almost exact parallel to the Jesus story. Ubiquitous, too, in primitive ritual was the custom of eating the god. It was related to fertility rites and stems from cannibalistic fantasies, perhaps even actual practices, involving the father. Later the totem animal is substituted for the father and is eaten, sometimes torn apart while still alive. Ritual meals are usually a further sublimation of these original rites. The Mass or Holy Communion in Christianity is a symbolic residual of this same primitive rite of eating the god. Although the act of Communion has been highly spiritualized, the violence of the controversies which raged for centuries among Church authorities as to whether the wine and wafer are actually transubstantiated into the blood and body of Christ testifies to the strong unconscious hold which such ideas exert. Dogmas such as the Virgin Birth and practices such as the chastity vows of the priests and nuns testify to the depth of the sexual conflict, of which such dogmas and practices are attempted resolutions. The father-principle is at once accepted, by the inclusion of God in the trinity, and rejected, by the central role played by Jesus, the son. The procreative male is not permitted to function in the conception of Jesus. Instead an abstract principle, the Holy Ghost, is the fecundating agency. Similarly, the female does not accept the full boon of her femininity but she is impregnated asexually. Yet her loving mother-function, once the child is born, is acceptable and receives full adoration in many Christian denominations and some in all of them.

A scholarly analysis of this aspect of Christianity is given by Dr. Henry Allen Bunker in Volume III of *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences* in an extensive paper titled "Psychoanalysis and Religion." He says, in part

Whether it be Herakles or Pelops or Jesus or the novice in the puberty rites, it is true in the case of all of them, however variously it may be expressed, that in the "covenant" which is called "religion" the father grants the privilege of growing up to the son, if he fulfills certain conditions. . . . It would seem beyond all doubting that "born again" is and can only be a reference to that which every male child must, with much travail, undergo: that second birth from the thigh of Zeus which Dionysus, for example, underwent . . . that "death and resurrection" which is so central a part of the *Passio Domini*; on the one hand, a weaning from the mother (the unreal life, to which a man must die) . . . and, on the other hand, "graduation" into adult sexuality, into sexual maturity—being "born into the real life."

Applying the tests of psychoanalytic investigation, most writers find Christianity to fall short of what might be designated a mature religion. What about Judaism?

THE ROLE OF THE PRIMITIVE IN JUDAISM

There is no doubt that there are, within Judaism, relics of the primitive. But are these characteristic or marginal? In the realm of religion, is Judaism an infant, an adolescent or, over the ages, has it grown to maturity?

Analyzing the primitive elements in Judaism in a penetrating psychoanalytic study entitled "The Pan-Headed Moses—A Parallel," in volume 32 of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Dr. Eva M. Rosenfeld admits that ". . . in the horns of Moses are haunting memories of the wild god Pan as well as of the immovable Yahveh." The early relationships of the individual do represent the source out of which religious impulses grow, but in Judaism, she finds, the attempt to bring order out of all the conflicting voices which speak to us leads to the final victory of conscience and spiritual values. Monotheism brings organization into the chaos and enables science and intellect, rather than primitive emotions, to attain a commanding position . . . "The development of monotheism was, like the formation of the super-

ego, a gradual process in which each phase retained traces of the epoch which preceded it." . . . But the end product, she agrees, was very different from its origins and attained a high state of maturity.

Dr. Arthur B. Brenner, in an article "The Covenant with Abraham" in volume 39 of the *Psychoanalytic Review*, states: "A clue [regarding the worth-whileness of Judaism] . . . can be found in the Jewish belief that God made a special covenant with their ancestor Abraham." Such a voluntary mutual covenant would be entered into by God "only with a people who possess a sense of responsibility, i.e., a super-ego . . . Hebraism therefore arrives at a mature means of identification with the Father-God by internalization, not of His symbolized flesh, but His authority, His law, His moral standards." Clearly, by the great moral insights which it has shown from its very beginnings, Judaism has earned the right to be designated a superior faith.

DO FREUD'S STRICTURES APPLY TO JUDAISM?

One wonders whether, if Freud had known intimately any religion but the narrow orthodoxies with which he came into contact, he would still have said, in his *Future of an Illusion*

The more the fruits of knowledge become accessible to men, the more wide-spread is the decline of religion.

His contacts with modern liberal religious institutions and thought were minimal, although he did derive intellectual stimulation from Spinoza. What contacts he did have with liberal religion did not impress him. In the same work which has just been quoted, he says

Not even the purified religious ideas can escape this fate, so long as they still try to preserve anything of the consolation of religion. Certainly, if you confine yourself to the belief in a higher spiritual being, whose qualities are indefinable and whose intentions cannot be discerned, then you are proof against the interference of science, but then you will also relinquish the interest of men.

Freud's assertion that religious impulses originate in the Oedipus Complex is undoubtedly true. But this does not, contrary to his belief, stigmatize religion as neurotic. We speak of "the in-

fantile neurosis," it is true, yet we recognize that the Oedipus Complex supplies the building materials out of which adult sexuality is constructed. Out of the child's desire for exclusive possession of his mother grows the desire for exclusive possession of his mate, the foundation of fidelity in family life, and out of his aggressive impulses toward his father grow the traits which enable a man to win a place for himself in the world and to provide for and protect his family. So it is with the primitive impulses of religion. They need not remain primitive. They can serve as a springboard from which man's spirit can soar to great heights. Their origin in the Oedipus is not fatal.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MATURITY OF JEWISH DOGMA

If we examine Judaism closely, we find that, like psychoanalysis, its outlook is anthropophilic rather than misanthropic. Judaism protests against doctrines which diminish the stature of man or brake his physical, mental or moral growth, which limit or distort his interrelationships with his fellow men or make his security or destiny dependent upon supernatural interventions, which foster fear and guilt out of relationship to reality and behavior or offer easy mechanisms of escape or salvation, which project his sins onto tempting devils or rescuing deities, which are rationalizations instead of reasons and employ regression and suppression as modes of resolving conflicts or crises, which make an alliance with the status quo to justify oppression or injustice, which drain off healthy discontent with this world by soporific promises about the world to come, or which castigate science and cultivate ignorance in order to shield sacred dogmas.

By every test which can be applied scientifically, Judaism is a mature religion despite its primitive origins. It has, in fact, cherished a belief in a "higher spiritual being," and has not, contrary to Freud's prediction, been forced to "relinquish the interest of men." Rebelling, just as Freud and others before and after him have done, against the untenable outlooks of the prevailing religions, Judaism has gone forward fearlessly with firm determination to create a way of life aimed in the direction which Freud

cherished most, the ultimate triumph of the cultured man.

FORCES SHAPING INDIVIDUAL RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS

If Judaism is a faith worthy of the allegiance of mature, intelligent men, then it is proper to consider opening the channels through which non-Jews may enter wider than tradition has hitherto sanctioned. This brings us directly to the consideration of the individual. What leads a person to accept his native religion or to reject it and shift to another? The dynamics of individual belief or disbelief, affiliation or conversion, in other words, the dynamics of everyday faith and skepticism, may serve as a guide to religious agencies desiring to inaugurate appropriate logistics.

Most people accept religion along with their mother's milk, taking on in childhood, the age of trust, the pattern of their parents' faith. We learn from psychoanalysis that much of a child's religious orientation to the universe is influenced by the kind of relationship which exists in the home between the parents, and between the parents and the children. In a home where the mother, true to the pattern in which God created her, cherishes and never rejects her femininity either as a wife or as a mother, where the father is the prototype of strength and masculine procreativity as well as of love and tender protectiveness, and where the child is regarded as having worth and dignity in his own right as he matures, there a healthy God-concept can develop. This child can conceive of a friendly universe, ruled over by a good, kind, loving and supporting God. Such a God tempers justice with mercy and strengthens love with limits, just as an earthly father must do if his child is to be reared properly.

However, in a home in which the parental figures are harsh, cruel, rejecting, punitive and demeaning in their attitude toward the child, we must expect some identification of the Father in Heaven with the father on earth and some projection of the child's reactions onto his concept of the relationship between God and man. It is interesting, when we look into the personal history of some of the leaders of the pessimistic movement in modern Christian theology, to note how often their unhappy relations

with their earthly fathers seem to color their concepts of the relations between God and man. It is as though their theology leaps out of the miseries of their childhood and youth. This same phenomenon can be traced in the cases of others than theologians, as, for example, Franz Kafka, the writer. Wherever we find it written that the world is bleak, man hopeless and existence purposeless, it is well to search for subjective distortions of vision, with unhappy familial relations at the root, before giving the author the acceptance that his logic might suggest. This pessimistic outlook, in some cases, prepares the way for acceptance of a more optimistic evangelical faith. A genuine conversion then takes place.

The age of trust characteristic of the early years of life is followed, in youth, by an age of doubt. If the influence of the home and parents has not been a favorable one, this may lead to skepticism and disillusionment. The result may be a rejection of all ideals and values, which could lead to delinquency, or of religious ideals and values alone, which can lead to agnosticism or atheism, or a rejection of the parental religion and conversion to another. If, on the other hand, the relationships between the parents and the children have been good, then in most cases the youth will go on to develop a faith of some kind, very likely that of his parents, to carry with him through life. The rebelliousness of youth can be a healthy thing, a relinquishment, along with the hampering authority of the parents, of the too cushioning, easy dependency of childhood, preliminary to acceptance of the authority of adult codes and conventions, principles and ideals, as well as of the authority of law. The mature individual has no difficulty living under this man-made authority or under the immutable laws of the universe operating under God's authority, because his attitude is neither one of surly rebellion nor of abject, fear-laden submission. No converts are gained in this quarter.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR MASS CONVERSION

Where a large number of members of the same group simultaneously shift from one faith to another, this is rarely attributable to genuine conviction. Sometimes the faith of a population is so

primitive that missionaries have little difficulty in persuading them to change, especially when the religious preachments are accompanied by some offer of material advantages, such as clothing, food, medical care and the like. However, as has been observed in countless instances, under these circumstances the understanding of the new faith is rudimentary and only those elements in it which can be identified with their original primitive notions are absorbed, while most of their inherited system of beliefs and practices remains firmly imbedded and quite unchanged. Even in our own society, the practice of offering soup and salvation, the Bible in one hand and bed-and-board in the other, has not entirely disappeared and there is reason to believe that its effectiveness is about the same in our social setting as it is in more primitive societies.

Another major factor accounting for mass conversions is force. It may be at sword's point, as in the case of the forcible conversion of millions to Islam during its numerous *jihads*. It may be a bit more subtle, as in the case of the Spanish Inquisition. It may be by governmental fiat, as in the conversion of the entire Roman Empire in the time of Constantine. Or it may be through force exerted entirely indirectly, though very effectively, on large numbers of individuals at the same time with no mass fanfare. So it was with the intellectual Jews of Germany and Austria in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when they were denied positions in the universities or in government service unless they were baptized.

The influence of a personality can also lead great masses to change their faith. Besides the original founders of the religions, who carried all before the profound and electrifying force of their personalities and their preachments, others, too, have arisen in every time and clime and have found a following. Almost within our own day, for example, we have seen Mormonism founded by Joseph Smith, Christian Science by Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy and, within Judaism, the Chassidic movement of the *Baal Shem Tov*. While Protestantism differed from Catholicism mostly on matters of organizational policy and while, before and after

the Reformation, Christian theology was quite similar throughout the various segments of Christendom, Martin Luther in Germany and Henry the Eighth in England swept millions of individuals out of one sect and into another as though a new faith were dawning. In each case, the catalyst of a powerful personality worked in an environment seething with rebelliousness and discontent to bring about a mass reaction. The influence of the father-image in mass religious upheavals is apparently as potent as it is in the personal development of each individual. We should not minimize this element in seeking to understand the dynamics of mass persuasion in religion.

WHY "THE MASSES" HAVE NOT BEEN CONVERTED TO JUDAISM

We may have here a clue to one of the important reasons why Judaism has not emerged as one of the great missionizing faiths, despite the great galaxies of inspired and inspiring personalities who have abounded in its long history. Not one of them ever claimed supernatural priority or power and, if he had, no Jewry of any country, community or congregation would have yielded its autonomy to such an individual. This situation is unchanged today; hence we cannot expect mass conversions to Judaism under the influence of an overpowering personality. Furthermore, the dynamic impulse toward missionizing is so moderate in Judaism that it is difficult to conceive of the preparation of some great logistical enterprise by means of which converts might be attracted, such as we find in faiths where great emphasis is placed upon missionary endeavor and where funds, institutions, procedures and trained personnel abound for this purpose.

The reasons which lead single individuals to convert from one religion to another still remain to be considered. While these run the gamut of human thought and emotion, covering the widest possible spectrum, it is possible to classify the dynamics under three headings: prudential, rational and neurotic.

PRUDENTIAL FACTORS LEADING TO CONVERSION

Among the prudential considerations, probably the largest category of people who convert from one religion to another are those who do so in order to marry a person of a different faith. According to Rabbi Eichhorn's survey, this group constitutes ninety-five percent of contemporary converts to Judaism. This condition is designated as prudential because there is an element of expediency and calculation in the decision to convert, rather than conviction alone. Sometimes the conversion is made a condition precedent by the religious authorities, without which they will not sanction or perform the marriage. But often, even when a religious ceremony is not indispensable or even desired, the couple may decide that one or the other will nevertheless convert so that the home they are establishing may be a religiously homogeneous one. They feel that children brought up in a home with divided religious loyalties may become confused about religion, if not actually hostile or indifferent to it.

Conversion to gain some material advantage is, for some, another prudential consideration. History abounds with instances where the highway to position or preferment or the only way to escape misfortune and preserve life was conversion. It could promote a career or avert exile. In our day, religious affiliation, though not necessarily conversion, has been used by some to afford protective coloration, as, for example, to avert suspicion of unsavory political affiliation during the McCarthy hysteria. Probably one should include, under the category of prudential considerations, those border-line instances where theological promises of long life, health and prosperity, success, victory over adversaries, or a sure hereafter in the world-to-come are the main attraction to a religious devotee. These conversions often give the appearance of being the result of seduction rather than conviction.

RATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CONVERSION

Under the second heading, rational considerations, are included those who come to a new faith out of the sheer conviction that it is superior to whatever faith was held previously. Something has

happened, usually, in the lives of these people to disappoint or disillusion them with the beliefs, practices, institutions or personnel of their old religion. In this time of disbelief, they have come into contact with another religion which seems to offer them all or most of what they find lacking in their own. Some find the dogmas of their present religion too illogical, others find them too rational; some find the ceremonials and rituals too cold and unappealing, others find them too emotional or "pagan"; some see their ethical system as too rigid and unyielding, others find it too permissive and tolerant; some find their religious institutions top-heavy with organization and personnel, others find the program of their church too ethereal and unrelated to the harsh facts of reality; and so on *ad infinitum*. The percentage of conversions falling in this category would probably be found to be in a fluid state, a two-way street, with traffic moving in both directions and with each convert seeking and finding something in the new religion to suit his individual needs. In all likelihood, a traffic survey of the conversions would show an edge of preponderance of movement from the orthodoxies toward the liberal faiths, but individuals are nevertheless found moving in every direction. The second category, rational considerations, probably brings far fewer people to conversion than do the prudential considerations.

NEUROTIC REASONS FOR CONVERSION

The third heading, neurotic reasons for conversion, probably is the least significant from the point of view of numbers but, as case studies, these are the most interesting conversions. In Judaism, we know that there is a centrifugal force pulling some Jews away from their affiliation with their people and their faith. Feelings of inferiority over being Jewish are fixed in their minds. Something has happened in their experience in early life to make them ashamed of their Jewish appearance, name, parentage, heritage, religious practices, etc. Thereafter, they tend to move outward, away from their Jewishness, as far and as fast as circumstances will permit. They may merely hide their Jewishness, they may go further and deny it, or they may go all the way and become con-

verted to some other religion. Even in this extreme act, differing degrees of alienation are found; some will merely become Unitarians or Universalists or Bahaists; some (the largest number, incidentally, of those who leave Judaism) will join Christian Science; a small percentage will affiliate with the less evangelical Protestant denominations; an even smaller number will join the fundamentalist Protestant groups or the Roman Catholic church. There are a few present day instances of Jewish converts who have become ministers, priests and nuns.

Shame and *selbst-hasse* are certainly neurotic motivations. They may have their origins in unresolved adolescent rebellion, in which the authority of the father, whether earthly or divine, is rejected in all its forms and manifestations. The new religion has a new father-figure who assumes the role of the good parent, counteracting the bad one against whom the rebellion was aimed. The new religion may also offer a new mother-figure, a fairy godmother, to counterbalance the wicked-witch-mother. The conversion may represent a retaliation-and-revenge syndrome, calculated to hurt the parents as much as possible, even though it does not necessarily succeed in making the convert happy. This sort of thing also sometimes crops up in the choice of a vocation or a mate, or in delinquent behavior. The needs out of which neurotic impulses toward conversion may grow include a masochistic desire for self-degradation, punishment and rejection, or a tendency toward escapism from the unpleasant realities of this world, or from a pleasant but frightening part of living, like sexuality. This may lead to monastic isolation or dependent regression into the waiting arms of some church-mother. The convert's hostility may be so great toward his original faith that he may return to castigate and missionize his former coreligionists. The need for punishment may be so compelling that, even after conversion, the person may continue to deny, deprive and torture himself, body and soul, with fanatical fervor.

Sometimes a reverse mechanism is present, as when a conversion for reasons of marriage is based on neurotic voluptuary expectations as to sex. The person, in such cases, harbors the secret

conviction that forbidden fruit is sweeter and that the exotic is, *ipso facto*, erotic. This accounts for a certain proportion of inter-racial as well as inter-religious marriages.

It should also be noted that there may be centripetal forces, pulling the individual inward, toward the core and center of Jewish affiliation and participation, which may be equally neurotic. Their origin may be in a deep, perhaps even unconscious need to counteract the centrifugal pull of an inferiority feeling or a *selbst-hasse*. When the latter cannot be faced or admitted, by the mechanism of reaction-formation an equal and opposite form of behavior may be manifested. This type of person will not leave his faith and convert to another but, while remaining within it, he may exert an unhealthy influence wherever he goes. It is this type of person who may be responsible for some of the defeatism, discouragement and debilitation from within which sometimes hampers Jewish organizational and religious work.

BORDERLINE MOTIVATIONS FOR CONVERSION

There is another group of converts who fall on the borderline between rational and neurotic psychological motivations. These are the persons who convert to a religion because of a catastrophic personal situation or event and who expect to receive help not available through any other source. This is observed in persons who become Christian Scientists because of an incurable ailment or because medical science has failed to help them. Some turn to another religion upon the death of a loved one, especially an untimely death which embitters them, or upon the loss of a fortune, or a shattering disappointment in love, or a public scandal or disgrace, or to help them overcome some kind of addiction, such as for alcohol, drugs, gambling or women. In all these instances, there are healthier resolutions of their problem available, but the stricken individual is not quite strong enough to face the realities and to work through the problem or crisis patiently. He wants quicker or easier answers in the face of the deprivation which his difficulty represents to him and he is unable to make a more mature response. Of such we may say that they are retreating rather than advancing

into religion.

This last variety of religionist will not derive much comfort from the dynamics of Judaism. Judaism has no central human-divine personality. It offers no promises of easy panaceas for social or individual conflicts. It does not emphasize the resolution of these in the hereafter. It offers merely the hard road of ethical advancement.

A SOUND RATIONALE FOR JEWISH CONVERSIONIST EFFORTS

It should be clear from this study of the dynamics of the situation that no great logistic campaign for conversion to Judaism is likely to be mounted under existing conditions and if, by some stretch of the imagination, it should be mounted, it would not be likely to succeed. Certainly the launching of such a campaign is not, traditionally, an appropriate function of Jewish religious leadership and it most certainly is not the objective of this book.

However, there are large numbers of religiously unaffiliated or disaffected individuals outside the ranks of the Jewish people who, for various reasons, feel little or no attachment, allegiance or interest for the faith in which they were reared. They may perhaps be won over, undramatically, by a mature religion with an inspiring message and an appealing and enriching way of life. Those who have joined in the writing of this book believe that Judaism is just such a religion. Furthermore, we believe that the time has come to let the whole world know that we welcome warmly all fellow-believers and will do our utmost to make worthy and righteous proselytes feel "at home."

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONVERSION TO JUDAISM:
SOCIOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

by

SAMUEL TEITELBAUM

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the sociological impact of the phenomenon known as conversion upon that variety of religious experience known in its totality as Judaism. What are the sociological factors involved in the conversion process? What lasting effects upon inter-group and intra-group relationships result from the proselyting activities of Jews and the conversions to Judaism produced by such activities?

Inasmuch as we shall discuss conversion and proselytizing as religious phenomena, it is essential that we arrive at a clear understanding as to what is meant here by the term "religion." For our purpose, religion may be defined as a belief in and a relationship and/or reaction or response to a force or forces, regarded as being superior to any human force or forces, supernatural in character, and having a measure of influence upon human life and events.

Our underlying presupposition is that Judaism comes within this definition of religion. It is true that Judaism has been described frequently as a way of life and living, which, by sociological denotation, means a culture. But, historically speaking, Judaism is clearly and predominantly a religious culture. There are indeed certain elements of the Jewish people who, though identified as Jews, regard themselves as secularists. Their attachment to Jewry may at best be merely cultural or ethnic. But even they cannot wholly escape the religious overtones of Judaism, for Judaism is steeped in religion. Religion is its very warp and woof. Hence,

while non-religious Jews may be disinterested in or even hostile to such a religious act as conversion to Judaism, the matter of conversion remains an important one for most Jews and for Judaism.

What is the sociology of religion and how does it apply to conversion? The sociology of religion consists of those religious factors and phenomena affecting and affected by social factors and phenomena. It is the study of the interrelation and interaction of the forces of religion and the forces of society. It seeks to determine how much of religion can be attributed to the processes of socialization and how religion is involved as a factor in inter-human action and behavior. Since the scope of religion either is or is held to be universal, uniformities, similar patterns and configurations in the sociological frame of reference should be discoverable everywhere.

Conversion to Judaism is a religious phenomenon which affects and is affected by social factors. It involves human and social relations and processes both within the Jewish community and the "great society." Hence, the theories and generalizations of sociology should be able to embrace it, and such empirical tests and studies and experiential observations as may be undertaken with reference to it should verify its sociology.

The essential functions of a formalized religion are to formulate and offer means for dealing with superior forces, for influencing emotional expression in human crises and for building group or social solidarity and unity. Conversion impinges upon all these functions. Conversion entails some kind of change in one's conception of the supernatural. The convert presumably undergoes an emotion-filled spiritual and intellectual experience. His conversion affects the unity and solidarity of the religious group which he leaves and of the religious group which he joins. Conversion is, therefore, a sociological as well as a psychological process.

JUDAISM IS A MISSIONARY FAITH

For more than two millennia Judaism has had no geographic boundaries; even when its center was in Palestine, the number of its adherents was never large. What is more, Judaism has tended

to be confined to the particular ethnic or religio-cultural group known as the Jews. There is, therefore, some question whether the synagogue falls within the general classification of "the universal church," that is, the type of religious collectivity which is not limited by ethnic or geographic considerations. For many years, Jews have enjoyed debating whether they represent a particularistic or a universalistic religious entity. Let us see whether Jewish social history casts any light upon this subject.

It is an elementary implication of monotheism that a universal God's interest cannot be confined to a particular people. If there is but one God, there can be only one religion—hence the idea of universality in and of Judaism. The Bible states repeatedly that Israel is the instrument, the servant of God who will bring His "light to the nations."

The belief that the true religion must be a universal religion necessarily makes Judaism a missionary faith. A confirmation of this is found in many Scriptural passages describing the "end of days." In the golden age to come, Judaism will take the form of an internationalization of the present national religion. To be sure, so long as the outlook of the religion was purely earthly and national, casting one's lot with that of the Jewish people was the only way by which an alien could hope to share in its glorious future. But this stage in Judaism's development ended with the First Exile.

As the idea of ethical monotheism took firm root in Judaism, it entered on a full fledged missionary career and spread its teachings far beyond the borders of Palestine with great zeal and a large measure of success. The synagogues in the Diaspora were centers of such propagandistic activity and gathered in both full converts and "fellow-travelling" half-converts, *Yirey Adonai*, "God-fearers."

Judaism was, in fact, the first great missionary religion of the Mediterranean world. True, the Jews did not send out professional missionaries to the unfaithful or the unbelievers. But they did not hesitate to advocate the truths of their religion in their daily association with non-Jews and through the synagogue. The majority of the new adherents won over to Judaism were women, partly

because they had more time than had the men to devote to the study and practice of religion and partly because it was easier for a woman than for an uncircumcised male to convert to Judaism. The *ger* of the Bible, the stranger, a metic or alien settler, gave place to the *ger* of Mishna and Talmud who came as out-and-out proselyte.

After the fall of the Jewish state in 70 CE, the conception of the character and mission of the religion of Israel underwent a marked transformation. Like Philo before him, Rabbi Judah the Prince, the redactor of the Mishna, regarded the proselyte and the born Jew as equals. Each was "a son of the covenant." The Jews, however, did not always confer complete social equality upon converts. Also, only converts who came of their own free will were wanted. Forced conversion was not countenanced, as is evidenced by the rabbinical hostility to the actions of John Hyrcanus among the Idumeans.

The Talmudic sages were aware that many came to be converted for purely worldly motives, e.g., the "love proselyte" who changed over in order to get married to a Jew. The view of a number of the scholars was that these proselytes were to be accepted, even though the reason for their converting was not the most worthy one. The general principle followed was that the true motives back of many conversions lie beyond the bounds of legal cognizance. Caution was urged in dealing with candidates for conversion. "The left hand should always repel and the right hand attract" was the admonition of the sages.

The rise of Christianity offered the Jewish propagandists keen competition, because the ceremonial and intellectual demands of Christianity were not nearly as rigorous as those of Judaism. The contention for converts between Christianity and Judaism continued until well into the fourth century CE.

Even in later eras, when Judaism was oppressed and Jews deprived of the right to convert, there was never a time when some non-Jews did not ask for admission into the household of Israel. While the attitudes among Jewish leaders and teachers with regard to proselytes and proselytism were often ambivalent and

divergent, they depended in large part upon what the sociologist, W. I. Thomas, calls "the definition of the situation," the Jewish interpretation of the social circumstances in which the Jews found themselves in a particular time and place.

The so-called traditional anti-conversionist attitude built up during the Middle Ages was relaxed somewhat in the period of emancipation which followed the French Revolution and the rise of Reform Judaism. The "Jewish mission" idea, which had been lying dormant, was revived. Yet, even in Reform Judaism, the idea was employed principally as a slogan. Jews were to be the exemplars of monotheism and ethics rather than active missionaries. Only in recent years has Reform Judaism relaxed its antagonism, still powerful in Orthodox and Conservative Jewish circles, to marriages of converted Gentiles to born Jews.

It is clear that the severe strictures placed by Christian and Muslim upon Jewish proselytizing for more than a millennium and a half were not always completely enforced or entirely effective. It is also clear that if "the definition of the situation" is now favorable, in the United States and elsewhere, to a renewal of missionary propaganda and action, the Jewish community should give serious consideration to the reinstitution of an activity that was suspended fifteen hundred years ago because of outside pressure.

CURRENT JEWISH ATTITUDES

Louis Finkelstein in his book *The Pharisees, the Sociological Background of Their Faith* gives a materialistic twist to Talmudic discussions on the question of conversion to Judaism. According to Rabbi Finkelstein, the attitude toward proselytism among Jews of the Pharisaic period varied with the social strata of the Second Commonwealth. The farmer was an uncompromising nationalist; the urban plebeian a liberal universalist; the court aristocrat or patrician a perpetual opportunist. The plebeian Jews, or Judaites, as Finkelstein calls them, were disposed to admit into their ranks Babylonians and other pagans who desired to join them. Finkelstein believes this indicates that a form of Judaism which appeals

to the more cultured and educated Jews is favorable to proselytizing, while a tendency towards exclusion is typical of inferior Jews who cling tenaciously to an inferior form of Judaism. Whether this be so or not, it is clear that in every age the attitude of the Jew toward the convert and conversion has been colored by social class or socio-economic considerations, as well as by theological and ethical factors.

As a group, Jews have not been engaged in actively propagating their faith among Gentiles for about fifteen hundred years. In the eighteenth century, emancipation catapulted them out of the medieval ghetto into the modern world. But emancipation failed to bring about any significant modification in the Jewish group attitude toward proselytism. Even today, despite all social compacts between Gentiles and Jews, the Jewish taboo against converting as well as against intermarrying remains largely in force as a social, if not as a legal or religious, measure. The various wings of Judaism may differ in degree but not in kind. Orthodox Jewry still imposes the strictures of the Shulchan Aruch against conversion and intermarriage. Conservative Judaism is reluctant to seek converts. Reform Judaism, though more flexible and liberal, has tended to discourage overt proselytizing.

When Rabbi Eichhorn, the editor of this book, made a study of American conversions to Judaism in 1954, he found that Orthodox rabbis were exceedingly reluctant to become involved in the whole matter. Some Orthodox rabbis stated that any talk of converting non-Jews to Judaism is nonsensical and stupid. They maintained that their opposition to the conversion of Gentiles was based on Jewish tradition and made it very plain that they would surround the process of conversion to Judaism with the severest possible demands. Yet, according to Rabbi Eichhorn, each year more than two thousand non-Jews are being converted to Judaism in the United States. It is true that only a small percentage of them become Jews without the involvement of marriage. But, as Rabbi Eichhorn has written, the majority of these proselytes constitute "a valuable spiritual asset" to contemporary Judaism. Almost without exception, Reform and Conservative rabbis train and receive

converts and regard most of them as worthy and good Jews.

A vivid illustration of the current Jewish attitudes towards the question of proselytism was afforded this writer through a sampling survey which he conducted both among rabbis and Jewish laymen.

To a question as to whether Judaism has a world mission, a universal message of faith and works, nearly ninety per cent of the Reform rabbis replied in the affirmative. Less than fifty per cent of them, however, believed that Judaism is a missionary faith. What is more, a significantly smaller proportion, only thirty per cent, was prepared to have Judaism engage in missionary work among Gentiles.

Some of the comments on both sides of these questions were interesting.

Those favorable to proselytizing offered such statements as the following

Many Christians look to us for the core of religious idealism. The simplicity, practicality and colorfulness of Judaism have inherent universal appeal.

Have been in favor of this and have so stated. . . . Judaism is a religion with a world message. Because of the blood-letting we endured in this generation, an additional million Jews would surely not hurt us.

Missions to convert people to Judaism in Japan would be most successful. Jews have the obligation to share their faith with people all over the world. Rabbis should be stationed in the centers of all the great civilizations, especially in Japan and India, for the purpose of acquainting the public with the point of view of Judaism.

On the other hand, some of the Reform rabbis who were unfavorably disposed to the missionary idea wrote in the following terms

How does a liberal get mixed up with this stuff? . . . Am opposed to chasing after souls. . . .

I am opposed to all direct religious missionary activity. It is based on false assumptions of religious superiority. Max Mueller should be required reading for seminarians of all faiths, and denominational clergymen might thus lose their delusions of religious grandeur.

While no clear-cut conclusions may be drawn from the diverse

reactions to this part of the questionnaire, there does seem to be an emerging pattern. On the whole, Reform rabbis display an awareness of the social as well as the religious factors entailed in the problem of Judaism and conversion. Some show signs of beginning to question the traditional presumption of averseness to proselytizing. They seem to be willing to acknowledge the need for reappraisal and re-evaluation.

Conservative rabbis, like their Reform colleagues, welcome converts to Judaism. But only two-thirds of those who answered the questionnaire, compared to almost ninety per cent of the Reform group, looked upon Judaism as a religion with a world mission. Even more striking were the responses of the Conservative segment to the question as to whether Judaism is a missionary faith and whether it should engage in direct missionary activity among non-Jews. Only ten per cent replied in the affirmative to both questions as against fifty and thirty per cent, respectively, of the Reform respondents. The more emphatically negative attitude of the Conservative rabbis was reinforced by such assertions as that Judaism's mission is to fortify the ethnic integrity of the Jewish people and that our message to mankind should be disseminated only by an exemplary way of life on our part. "I have generally found," wrote one Conservative rabbi, "that people asking to be admitted on completely ideological grounds are usually neurotic."

On the whole, Conservative rabbis seem far less concerned and perhaps less troubled than are their Reform colleagues by what Reform Judaism calls "the mission of Israel." Yet, while the problem may not yet be as moot among the former as among the latter, it is beginning to receive more and more consideration from both these segments of the rabbinate. They appear to agree that, in the contemporary world-setting of faiths and cultures, the matter of conversion to Judaism merits further exploration.

What about the Jewish laity? Inasmuch as Judaism is not an hierarchical faith and the authority of the rabbi rests not on his "apostolic" succession but on the lay acceptance of his personality and knowledge, lay reactions to such a subject as conversion play a significant role.

The questionnaire sent to the rabbis was also distributed among executive directors and presidents of Jewish Community Centers and of Jewish Federations, Welfare Funds and Community Councils. It was felt that these laymen, because of their community interests, relations and associations, as well as their education, would have a clearer comprehension of the Jewish scene and milieu than lay people in fields of endeavor less directly related to the Jewish community.

The following comparative statistical tables reveal their reactions very vividly. On the critical question, whether Judaism is a religion with a world mission, the comparative findings on the rabbinical and lay groupings were:

	<i>Laymen</i>		<i>Reform Rabbis</i>		<i>Conservative Rabbis</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Yes	49	47.6	74	88.0	20	66.7
No	50	48.5	5	6.0	7	23.3
Uncertain	4	3.9	3	3.6	2	6.7
No data	0	0.0	2	2.4	1	3.3
Total	103	100.0	84	100.0	30	100.0

It is obvious that the laymen are less "mission"-minded than the rabbis. Some of the former's comments indicate this clearly.

The rabbis have this idea, but I question if other Jews do.

Who has a "world mission"? This is arrogance.

Judaism is alright for us—but who are we to say it is better for others? Here is an element of totalitarianism, intolerance and swell-headedness.

On the other hand, a lay respondent who answered in the affirmative declared

The continued existence of the Jewish people for so many generations is an indication of God's faith with mankind. The faith of western civilization is in essence, excluding theologic differences, the faith which Israel conceived and perpetuated from Mount Sinai down to our present day.

The generally negative attitude of these Jewish laymen towards the "Jewish mission" idea is proved further by the following com-

parative data as to whether or not Judaism is a missionary faith.

	<i>Laymen</i>		<i>Reform Rabbis</i>		<i>Conservative Rabbis</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Yes	13	12.9	40	50.6	3	10.7
No	81	80.2	32	40.5	22	78.6
Uncertain	7	6.9	7	8.9	3	10.7
Total	101	100.0	79	100.0	28	100.0

On the question of whether or not Jews should conduct missionary work among non-Jews, the ratios of the responses among the laymen were: 5.8% favorable; 77.7% opposed; 16.5% indifferent or uncertain. While the Conservative rabbinical sentiment was roughly comparable—10%, 63.3%, and 26.7% respectively, the Reform percentages differed appreciably—29.8%, 35.7%, and 34.5%.

It is quite clear that most of the laymen who took part in the survey are not favorably disposed towards the notion of a Jewish mission directly and actively pursued in the non-Jewish world. Indeed, it would seem that the Jewish laity, as a whole, would be averse or, at best, apathetic to such an undertaking.

The fact is that none of the wings of American Judaism now missionizes directly. Officially, at least, the various segments maintain a position of polite reserve on the matter of whether or not a large accretion of converts would be a cause for rejoicing. The unmissionary-like posture of most Jews is sometimes reflected in the treatment accorded voluntary converts. Although usually unpremeditated, it may, in a concrete situation, be quite revealing.

By way of illustration, let the writer relate an instance out of his own experience. Prior to the Second World War, he was a rabbi in a Southern community. He invited a woman, who had converted to Judaism and married a Jew many years before, to teach in his religious school. She was active in the congregation and had held important offices in the Sisterhood. Her Jewish education and zeal surpassed those of most of the women in the congregation. Yet overt congregational resistance to the appointment of this convert to the school faculty developed quickly. A loud

clamor was raised against the proposed action and it actually became a *cause célèbre*. The resentment of the convert and her husband to the community attitude caused her to withdraw her earlier happy acceptance of the post on the Sunday School teaching staff.

EXCLUSIVENESS OR INTERACTION

It would appear that, if Jews were to engage in missionary work in the United States, they would have a far stronger appeal to such a large racial minority as the Negroes than the present attraction of the American Negro toward Roman Catholicism. This is so because the Negro suffers from disabilities greater than but not unlike those endured by Jews. And yet, against the few Jewish congregations of colored people that exist in several metropolitan centers in America, a social—or shall we be more honest and say, a racial—distance is maintained by “white” Jews. The former are being almost deliberately isolated from the general Jewish community, from *k'lal Yisrael*.

On the other hand, on the social level at least, Jews in this country are often kept at a distance by non-Jews and are excluded from equal participation in communal affairs. Yet the charge is frequently heard among non-Jews that Jews are exclusive, that they are clannish, that they act as if they actually were “the chosen people.” The prevailing social distance between Jews and non-Jews has probably been mutually induced. For when peoples meet, as they inevitably do in a free and open society, unless they grow by enlarging their following, the less powerful may be absorbed and swallowed up by the dominant religion and culture.

Such has actually been the case in Italy where the Jewish community has been dwindling, both quantitatively and qualitatively, despite some conversions to Judaism. In the United States and other Western lands, where the influx of Jewish immigrants is virtually at a standstill and where the dominant culture is being assimilated rapidly by Jews, there are those who hold the conviction that Jews must either convert or be converted. It is also pointed out that the present general climate is particularly prepared for

this type of development. Not only is this a dynamic age of rapid social change but, currently, a revival of interest in religion seems to have become an active and on-going process. What is implied is that the social mobility that is having such a profound effect on all strata of our society is also playing a prominent role within organized religion—and Judaism should be prepared to sail with and not against the tide.

Jews, being just as human as all other human beings, cannot be expected to attract non-Jews to Judaism solely through exemplary conduct and right living. If the Jews remain a more or less segregated or exclusive group, their proclaimed mission to the world cannot and will not succeed. No group living in relative isolation can spread its culture or religion to others.

If Judaism has no message for human society as a whole or does not wish to carry its message to mankind, it may easily become either the exclusive cult of the State of Israel or that of a "pariah people," to use Max Weber's term. If Judaism has a mission to the world, it need not today cling to the passive role it was forced to assume in the medieval era. It could, in contemporary circumstances, resume missionary activity.

After all, by definition, a mission means that one has something to share with others. If Judaism is true, even if not the only truth, if the Jew is convinced that the pattern of Jewish community life is valuable in terms of both individual and social fulfillment, then how can he reconcile his religio-ethical tradition with an attempt to withhold these assets from the rest of mankind?

There are, even now, a few voices crying out that Judaism cannot be a light unto the nations by kindling that light solely for Jews, that Jews cannot longer remain a people boasting of its world mission without becoming missionary. If Judaism is a particularistic or ethnic faith, then it is understandable why it refrains from seeking converts, missionizing and the like, and why it so stubbornly balks or resists marriages between its members and adherents of other faiths. Conversely, if, as Jews often claim, Judaism has a universal mission, then it is hard to explain why it does not pursue that mission to any marked degree and invite outsiders

to enter its fold.

CLOSED OR OPEN SOCIETY

One cannot escape the dilemma by classifying the Jews as a third type of religious grouping, that of a sect—the other two being a national church or synagogue and a universal church or synagogue. For a sect, whether in its initial or in its established state, is not only a limited independent group but, basically, also one setting up its own body to protest against some prevailing doctrine, cult or organization. Jews and Judaism may be “protestant,” but they have been in existence far longer than most of those faiths against whom they protest. Jews may or may not be sect-like, but they do not constitute a valid sect-grouping.

Perhaps, then, we ought to approach Judaism and conversion from the point of view of the social structure of the religion. Is Judaism a cult, by which we mean a religion with some definable or recognizable form of action, worship, ritual or practice?

There are those who aver that Judaism has some of the semblances of a national cult. It is said that Judaism not only has its specific cultistic practices but also, like a state or nation, does not directly invite the “citizenship” of outsiders. It demands of those who apply not only full loyalty but also strict adherence to its ritualistic precepts and procedures.

But Jews, except in Israel, do not constitute a nation, and it is extremely questionable whether they are a nationality. Secondly, even if we assume that, during their ancient existence in Palestine, their cult was firmly established and held to more or less fixedly, such has not been the case in the Diaspora. Actually, it was not even true in Palestine—witness the wide ideological and ritualistic chasms that separated Pharisee, Sadducee and Essene. The rituals have varied greatly in different ages of time and in differing social environments. Today one need but observe the widely varying practices encountered in Orthodoxy, Conservatism and Reform, both inter- and even intra-group, to realize that Judaism is by no means a monolithic cult.

Moreover, while Jews have not for some time missionized, they

have, at the same time, rarely ousted, exorcised or even excommunicated anyone from the fold for failure to conform strictly to the ceremonial requirements. Today, especially, not only are the variations in ritualism among the Jews manifold, but large numbers of Jews, identified as such without reservation, fulfill few, if any, of the ritual customs. Yet neither thought nor action has been taken to expel them from the fold.

In short, in the contemporary period, at least, it is not any cultistic requisite of Judaism that hinders Jews from propagandizing for Judaism beyond its own confines. For Judaism is not essentially a cult. It does not even have a single, consistent, official doctrine, whether cultistic or theological, to say nothing of a fixed dogma. While, because of certain socio-historic circumstances, it has become a species of folkway not to seek converts directly, Jews neither are nor have been of one mind in their attitudes toward proselytes.

The Jewish leaders and teachers in the medieval ghettos seem to have made a virtue out of necessity when they established a social tradition of excluding the non-Jew. They prohibited overt proselytizing activities and set up well-nigh insurmountable obstacles against mixed marriage. This antagonism has survived as a social deterrent in Judaism to this day.

As a social tradition or force, this ghetto-psychology, since it was linked with religion, had to be based upon some source of authority or domination in order to be effective. Max Weber, who contributed so much to the sociology of religion as well as to general sociology, was the first to employ the Greek term *charisma* to account for the role of dominance, whether of personal leadership or of collective tradition, in religion. By charisma is meant "endowed with divine grace" and, therefore, endowed with power.

What appears to have happened is that the hostility to missionary activity became so deeply imbedded in Jewish tradition that it became charismatic, no doubt as a derived result of the original charisma reposed in the decisions of the Talmudic authorities. As a result, the audience of these charismatic leaders, that is, their followers or adherents, the Jewish people themselves, became charismatic.

It is such factors as these that gave strength to the tendency in Judaism towards making the Jewish people a "sacred" or closed rather than a "secular" or open society. Whatever external pressure may have contributed to this trend—and it has been considerable—it is undeniable that Jews have been predominantly an in- or "we"-group, regarding all non-Jews as an out- or "they"-group. Jews have tended to look upon themselves as a special charismatic group, implied in the term "chosen," and to regard others either as non-charismatic or as charismatic in a manner not commensurate with their own charisma.

Put bluntly, Jews have been exclusive as much as they have been excluded. They have, as a rule, kept outsiders out as vigorously as they have been kept out by outsiders. Hence the historically unnecessary continuation of the energetic resistance to proselytizing; likewise the opposition to mixed marriage.

However, regardless of its peculiarities, Judaism must be assessed sociologically like any other religion, namely, on the basis of its place and role in culture and society. For the meaning of a religion in all its essential phases lies in the culture and lives of people. Is Judaism exerting a healthy influence not only upon its own adherents but also in its greater milieu and environment, in the "great society" in which it exists and functions? Judaism claims to be universal in scope. It is commonly charged with being ethnocentric and particularistic. Which is it?

A religion can, by spreading its concepts and doctrines through the processes of conversion, proselytizing and missionary work, become more operative in society as a whole than through any other means, as witness Christianity. If Judaism persists in and insists on maintaining what is tantamount to an isolationist position, may not its influence *ipso facto* be or become minimal? It may indeed vitally affect the Jewish community, but what does it do for other communities in the American or any other body politic? Without conveying its religious ideas abroad, how can it play a maximal role in social motivations, attitudes, values, ideas? Can it, under such circumstances, appreciably increase affiliation with organized religious institutions and participation in their

functions, except among its own people?

In its continued exclusiveness, it will make but a small contribution towards the pacification of a world in conflict. In the inter-faith and interdenominational spheres, it may even aggravate the conflict-situation because of its sectarianism. If it is to help bring about a reconciliation between religion and science, it will have to demonstrate that, whereas science is chiefly concerned with the "what" and "how" of life, the means, Judaism's concern always has been for the "wherefore," the ends and goals of *all humanity*, not just for born-Jews. It will have to demonstrate that this continues to be the enlightened view of the Jewish religion.

Provided that its desire and aim are to be in and to promote a state of symbiosis, of co-operation rather than competition and hostility, of mutual aid rather than of mutual strife, Judaism must actively spread its gospel abroad. Unless it becomes "involved in mankind," to use John Donne's phrase, it remains insular and isolated. Unless it seeks to resolve the social problems that afflict humanity and not solely the "Jewish problem," which, for that matter, cannot be dealt with in separateness, Judaism exists in dissociation rather than in association. It can contribute little, if anything, in isolation that will produce social order out of the prevailing disorganization, confusion and chaos of our contemporary society.

Furthermore, if Judaism and Jews maintain their stand of a "sacred" and exclusive charismatic community, it is exceedingly doubtful whether they can make a contribution of any consequence today, when technology and mass communication are driving human beings willy-nilly into closer association. They will be incapable of relating any of the visible results of contemporary dynamic social movements to the realms of their social ideas and social action. How can they have any vital effect unless their viability and idealism are brought to bear directly on the nationalism and secularism of our age, on the socio-economic and political orders? Can Judaism play a prominent role in directing contemporary nationalistic and revolutionary movements toward moral ends, in matters involving war and peace, in short, on the inter-

national and universal scenes—and still remain aloof and exclusive? It cannot.

Even if we were to assume that religion's pre-eminent role lies in its effect upon the human personality—and Judaism makes no such assumption, for it gives at least equal emphasis to the social group or collectivity—does a religion fulfill its function when, like Judaism, its influence is concentrated largely upon the personalities of a single people, the Jews? Why should it not assert itself with maximum vigor by attempting to motivate the religious expression and experience of every individual within reach?

Each individual has certain psychological wants and needs that are common and permanent and that call for response and satisfaction. Judaism must missionize, i.e., must spread abroad its beliefs, ideas, doctrines, if it is to assist in the process of enculturation, the socialization of the individual, if it is to help develop the self in interaction, whether in the emotional, aesthetic, religious or any other spheres. In the long run, this type of associative behavior will contribute to the fuller personality development and socialization of both Jew and non-Jew.

These factors of desire and need also relate to the family, which is presumed to be the principal source of what are known as the psychogenic traits of the person. These traits emerge from the infant's and young child's interplay and interaction with the members of his family, especially his parents. The child brings these characteristics with him to the external environment, which he affects and which affects him.

Jewish parents tend to keep their children away from *goyim*, Gentiles. Even non-religious Jewish parents urge their children to socialize exclusively with "their own kind." They fear that wider associations will lead to mixed marriage. They fear that the entrance of an outsider into the family and fold may disrupt the stability and solidarity of the family and the integrity of the Jewish people.

But there are those who are beginning to ask whether Jews ought not to be willing to take these risks. Otherwise, Jews will be maintaining a closed community and failing to exert any

marked influence upon the larger society. The unity and wholeness of family life, so often ascribed to Jews, will make little or no impact upon others. To live in a more or less free, open and democratic society, without "democratizing" or associating with its members, is to lose a valuable opportunity both for the broadening of personality and for contributing to the social order.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

The major irony of all this is that, whereas such an individually oriented faith as Christianity does present its gospel to the masses of people of all races, classes and nationalities, Judaism, which purports to be socially oriented and community-minded, laying its stress upon group welfare and social amelioration rather than the merely personal good, refrains from spreading its message to other people. The implication is that the relationship of symbiosis, whereby social and ideational nurture are provided not on a parasitical but on a mutual basis, in which there is give-and-take, is lacking in Judaism.

Jews, along with many non-Jews, have strong objection to certain hyper-emotionalistic types of evangelism and religious revivalism that are in vogue in some religious circles. Some people tend to identify religious propaganda with this species of evangelism, often called "soul saving." But need it be such? As mentioned, Jews in some bygone epochs promulgated their faith among gentiles in an effective, reasonable and highly "respectable" manner. What is there to prevent them from continuing this practice today?

Jewish missionary activity in the past occurred chiefly when the times and conditions were most propitious, when, as in the Persian and later Greco-Roman periods, the Jewish cult was at least tolerated. May not one wonder, therefore, whether in the present climate, in the Western World at least, and despite some anti-Jewish outcroppings, there may not be good reason for the resumption of Jewish missionary effort?

Otherwise, we may be agreeing with the German sociologist, Ferdinand Toennies. He envisioned society as a whole divided into two fundamental and disparate forms: *Gemeinschaft* (community)

and *Gesellschaft* (society). He pronounced the former as being the union of individuals with "organic will," whose solidarity springs from the natural forces of blood or consanguinity. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, is a totality of individuals entering into a social compact with their individual wills.

But the kind of organic, biologic community which Toennies conceptualizes has no existence in social reality. It is reminiscent of the Nazi doctrine of "blood and soil." Even the Jewish community, though it may have an ethnic as well as a religious base, is not a "natural" organism.

Community and society are not absolutes but constructs, are what Max Weber calls "ideal types." They overlap and interact. Indeed, they must live in communication with each other, for no community can long survive, culturally or physically, isolated from society, and no society can long maintain its equilibrium and stability without its contained communities. They are interdependent.

Dominance, nevertheless, rests in the larger society. For a community to make an effective impact upon a society, e.g., the Jewish community upon the dominant society of the Christian majority in America, would seem to require the dissemination of religious-cultural information by the former; in other words, not evangelism but religious propaganda. Otherwise, the Jew, no matter how well integrated he may be with his own Jewish community, may well suffer the kind of loss of social rapport with the larger society that the French social scientist, Emile Durkheim, labeled *anomie*, "normlessness" and maladjustment.

As has been stated, Max Weber in his *Ancient Judaism* refers to the Jews as a "pariah people." This possibly unfortunate term is employed by Weber not in disparagement or contempt but in the sense of a "guest people." It does not have the meaning of "outcast" ascribed to it in the Indian caste system. It is associated with the sociology of the stranger, of minority groups, of the patterns of segregation and exclusion of in-groups and out-groups, and status relationships.

It is Weber's view that the essential factors entailed in the conflict situation between Jew and non-Jew derive from the Jew's

pariah state. But Weber agrees that Judaism is a religion with a world mission, that it contains universalistic aspects. The rational ethic and the ritualism which the Pharisees and rabbis took over from the prophets and the priests became, for the sake of Jewish self-preservation, following the rise of victorious Christianity, a "pariah" or separatist situation, reinforced both from without and within Jewry. The rabbinic successors of the Pharisees were compelled to enjoin proselytizing because of the proscriptions of the ruling authorities against Jewish missionary activity. Thus was the pariah experience of the Jewish people exacerbated.

What is the basis of the continued separateness of the Jew? How much of the Jew's reluctance to proselytize is due to an outmoded ghetto-mentality?

THE SOCIOLOGICAL ANSWER TO THE GHETTO MIND

In the Middle Ages a distinct economic and vocational caste, such as the Jews were, was required to live separately as a contiguous community. But, as Louis Wirth points out in his book *The Ghetto*, the ghetto, at first voluntary, arose from the separatism of the Jew and his determined desire to preserve his religion, culture, tradition and customs. The ghetto offered status, defense and protection, a sense of both moral and physical security to the Jew hemmed in by a hostile world.

But the ghetto also became a convenient advantage to the dominant church and the ruling classes. Hence, by the fifteenth century, it became completely compulsory for the Jew almost everywhere in Europe and was an established institution. Thus did the church seek to efface the "Judaizing heresy" and its influence upon Christians and Christianity.

The ghetto, in turn, produced a state of mind, sometimes called "the Jewish mentality," which allegedly spells separatism, exclusiveness and isolation. Wirth maintains that this type of mentality continued even after the physical barriers of the ghetto were broken down as a result of the French and American Revolutions and the emancipation of the Jews in Western Europe and America. When the emancipation did not bring the millennium that

some Jews had prognosticated and anti-Jewish attitudes persisted, Jews, borrowing from nineteenth-century European nationalism, founded political nationalisms of their own, predominantly Zionist and/or Socialist. Wirth contends that Zionism advocated the continued isolation of the Jewish people, through the establishment of a Palestinian home-land, as a means of resolving, if not solving, the Jewish problem.

Also Reform Judaism arose, in part, as an effort to relate the Jews more intimately to the larger society and the world. It sought to controvert "the nation within a nation" charge. It was a symptom of the physical disintegration and dissolution of the ghetto.

Though the Emancipation and Reform Judaism did increase the contacts between Jews and non-Jews and did institute formal political equality for the Jews, they did not succeed in establishing complete social equality. The social and religious barriers were not removed. The mental ghetto continued in one form or another. It remained as much a product of Jewish self-isolation from within as of prejudice and enmity from without. It represented a distinct culture lag.

Remnants of this mental ghettoization are still to be found in the transplanted communities of Jews in the New World. Even in the West, the Jew lives, in part out of self-choice, in a "duplex structure." He is marginal. Where intercourse between Jew and gentile is but minimally restricted and cultural and religious diffusion are possible, the hue and cry goes up constantly among insecure Jews for protection against assimilation, a hue and cry which often seems to be accompanied by a yearning for reghettoization.

The prevailing attitude is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, the Jew wants to be liked by the gentile. On the other hand, he wants to do little or nothing to carry his message of faith to the gentile, the message through which he may become both understood and liked. The Jew wants to preserve his "tribal" pattern by maintaining a cultural and religious island enclave or colony in a gentile sea.

Thus the Jew continues what Weber terms his "pariah" existence. He stands between two worlds and is not at home in either. Hence he experiences inner conflict and self-consciousness. Instead of overcoming this by seeking to establish a "common universe of discourse," by actively communicating his religious mission to the larger milieu and thereby bringing greater appreciation of and new adherents to his faith, he seems to long for a return to some new type of isolation.

Today, unlike the Middle Ages or the period of the Russian Pale, the Jewish pattern is no more that of a religious conformance. Nor is American Jewry being reinforced today, as it was previously, by a steady influx of immigrants. The restoration of the ghetto wall, even if it be but a mental image, can lead only to an increase in anti-Jewish prejudice. The religio-cultural contacts which many Jews seek to make with non-Jews are so restricted and incomplete that they may produce friction instead of harmony. What is being established by those who oppose a universalization of Judaism is an invisible ghetto resting on the emotions of individuals who are determined to be and to remain different.

In brief, ghettoization was and is not the cause but the effect of isolation. And whereas the isolation of the medieval past was forced upon the Jew by external pressure and decree, forbidding him to intermingle, intermarry and proselytize, today it is more self-enforced than compelled from without. The ghetto persists and exists not as a physical fact but as a state of mind. Jews are segregated because they are exclusive and their exclusiveness tends to increase because they are segregated. They do not even make a serious effort, as do Christians, to gain an understanding in the general community of the nuances of their religio-cultural pattern and thereby, perhaps, also acquire an additional following for that pattern.

Is the contention that such an undertaking might lead to a dilution of Judaism warranted?

The "conversionists" would say, in the first place, that it has often been noted that converts to Judaism are more faithful to its teachings than are born Jews. Their impact upon the latter and

the Jewish families into which they marry is often of such a nature as to shame the born Jew into fuller adherence and loyalty to Judaism.

Second, a person or a people with a perfervid conviction should seek to share it with others—and if a passion for Judaism does not exist among Jews, why preserve Judaism?

Third, Christianity has assuredly not been weakened by missionary effort; on the contrary, it has been greatly strengthened and vastly enlarged. Why not Judaism?

CHAPTER NINE

THE CONVERTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

by

ABRAHAM SHUSTERMAN

There is no central roster of converts to the Jewish faith. The unnumbered thousands who have embraced Judaism in every period of its history have been accepted as members of the household of Israel without being set apart from their coreligionists as "Jews by choice." The absence of appropriate communal records makes impossible the accurate counting of contemporary proselytes; but the rabbis of our time, especially in the United States, have testified repeatedly that the memberships of their congregations have been enriched by sincere and enthusiastic converts. There is one little volume, published in 1911 by Rabbi Barnet A. Elzas, which gives "A List of Converts to Judaism in the City of London, 1809-1816." And there is also the 1954 study of Rabbi Eichhorn, a study which indicates that over two thousand American men and women voluntarily enter Judaism each year. The latter study indicates that, in the opinion of the rabbis who have instructed these converts and have remained in close contact with them, these newcomers are a great asset to the Jewish faith. Their zeal and devotion exceed those of the Jewish-born.

In recent years the trend toward Judaism has become more marked. This has been true particularly in the United States where contacts between Jews and non-Jews are frequent and where the democratic right to change one's religion at will prevails. A case-history study of present-day proselytism in the United States would surely show that converts are being absorbed into the Jewish group without great difficulty and that they and their progeny are not

readily distinguishable from "native born" Jews. Dr. Eichhorn has shown that, at present, marriage is overwhelmingly the predominant motive for conversion. Those who come into Judaism because of an impending or existing marriage constitute 93.9% of all recent converts to American Judaism. To Dr. Eichhorn, the figure of 6.1% for those who embrace Judaism without any marriage involvement is surprisingly large in view of the fact that, until the last few years, American Judaism "has not made the slightest effort to attract non-Jews but, on the contrary, has done much to create the impression that converts are not wanted."

As an example of and as a tribute to a twentieth-century "righteous proselyte" who came into Judaism because of her love for our faith and for no other reason, I should like to record the story of Margaret Montgomery, the woman who prepared me for confirmation in the Mountain City Hebrew Reform Congregation, now Temple Beth Israel, of Altoona, Pennsylvania, in 1919-1920.

* * * *

MARGARET MONTGOMERY

I shall tell the tale of this gentle soul as it was narrated to me by the late Rabbi Moses J. S. Abels, the rabbi who knew her best:

Almost immediately after my arrival in Altoona in September, 1912, I received a visit from Miss Margaret Montgomery. She recited the history of her case and shyly requested two favors: one, to pay no attention whatever to her at services and, two, to try to help her procure employment that would enable her to observe the Sabbath. She was poorly dressed and, as she explained, was the sole support of her widowed mother, who was a faithful Catholic. She was Irish and, in her conversation, displayed a keen sense of humor. The parish priest and others had tried to hound her by spreading rumors that she was insane; but her mother, with whom she made her home, defended her stoutly and vigorously routed the gossip mongers whenever they opened their mouths. Of course, I complied with her requests. As soon as I got settled, I secured a position for her, with no work on the Sabbath, in the office of Noel W. Smith,

a Protestant and head of the Altoona branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. When I left Altoona, eleven years later, she was still there—a very efficient office worker, Mr. Smith often told me.

Her story was very simple: When she was about to take the veil to become a nun, she began to have serious doubts about the tenets of the Catholic faith. She had had sporadic feelings along the same line ever since she became a student at the convent and even before that. As the time drew near for her to take her final vows, she could no longer resist the urge to break completely with the Church and to follow her own convictions. At first she went to a Protestant minister to be enlightened. His views did not impress her. She then became interested in Judaism and conferred with Rabbi Klein, my predecessor. She began to devote her leisure time to reading every book on Judaism she could find. By the time she met me she had already read Graetz' six volumes of history and most other standard Jewish source books and, of course, the Union Prayerbook. She became convinced that, intellectually and spiritually, she was a Jewess. She began attending the Sabbath services, joined the Sisterhood, was elected its secretary and became a member of my religious school teaching staff. Ultimately, she became the much loved and highly respected teacher of the Confirmation Class, active in every Jewish undertaking and the first to contribute to every Jewish cause—far beyond her financial means. She was a saint, if ever there was one. In my eleven years she never missed a single service; even during the summer intermissions, she came alone into the synagogue and prayed quietly and ardently.

Miss Montgomery refused an official conversion service. Her plea was that God knew her heart and that she was too unimportant to be made a fuss over. When I heard of her death and of her burial in a Catholic cemetery, I was heart-broken. Because of public relations' reasons, the Jewish leaders of Altoona did not want to contest too vigorously and with legal action the insistence of Miss Montgomery's family that she be buried in their lot in the Catholic cemetery. She was a woman of great piety, wholeheartedly devoted to the cause of Judaism and the promulgation of its message to the world. She truly loved God, Israel and the Torah with all her

heart and soul and strength.

* * * *

There are in the memories and archives of many rabbis equally interesting tales which might be told of other contemporary individuals who have turned to Judaism because its teachings have satisfied their spiritual hunger.

There is, for example, the well-nigh unbelievable tale of Donato Manduzio and the village of San Nicandro.

* * * *

SAN NICANDRO

Donato Manduzio was born and reared in San Nicandro, a small farming village on a mountain top in southern Italy, in the part usually referred to as the "heel of the boot." As a child he was given no formal schooling. When the First World War began, he was drafted into the Army at the age of twenty. While in the Army, he learned to read and write. In 1918, Manduzio was wounded in the legs. For several years he could not walk. He took advantage of this period of enforced idleness to read all kinds of books. He read day and night. The acquisition of knowledge became his major objective.

In 1925 Manduzio read the Old Testament for the first time. The Roman Catholic villagers of San Nicandro were not encouraged to read the Bible and, if they did manage to get hold of a Scriptural text, it was usually the New Testament and, possibly in addition, the Book of Psalms. The more Manduzio read from the Old Testament, the more convinced he became of the lack of validity of the New Testament. Finally, he severed his connection with the Church and dedicated his life to teaching his fellow villagers the new truths which he had discovered in the pages of the Old Testament. By 1932 some thirty families of San Nicandro acknowledged Manduzio as their religious leader and accepted the faith he had found in the Hebrew Bible as their own.

They did not call themselves Jews. None of them had ever

knowingly met a Jew. Manduzio and his disciples literally did not know that Jews still existed. They thought that they were the only persons in all the world who were "true followers of the Mosaic laws."

About 1936, a visitor to San Nicandro, who happened to come in contact with this strange group, informed them of the existence of the Jews and gave them the name and address of Rabbi David Prato, Chief Rabbi of Rome. Manduzio immediately wrote to Rabbi Prato, requesting prayer books and other religious literature. He received no reply. He wrote a second and a third time. Finally, Rabbi Prato answered. He apologized to Manduzio for the delay, explaining that he thought the first two letters were the work of a practical joker, since he was certain there was no Jewish community in or near San Nicandro. He sent the requested prayer books. Before being forced to leave Italy for Palestine in 1939 because of the Hitler-Mussolini alliance and its consequent misfortunes for Italian Jewry, Rabbi Prato was as helpful as possible to this little band of would-be proselytes.

After the outbreak of the Second World War and despite the scorn of their neighbors and the persecutions inflicted on them by Mussolini's Blackshirts and Hitler's Brownshirts, Manduzio and his followers remained faithful to the God and people of Israel. They prayed continually for the day when the God of Israel would redeem them from their physical and spiritual bondage.

In the Fall of 1943, the prayed for miracle happened. Allied troops landed in the area and drove the Fascist Germans and Italians out of San Nicandro. A few weeks later, an even greater miracle happened.

Lieutenant Pinchas Lapid, Canadian born officer in the Jewish Brigade, Palestinian unit of the British Army, came in his jeep to the village of San Nicandro. When Manduzio and his followers saw the six-pointed Star of David on the shoulder insignia of the British officer, they believed he was the Messiah. The long awaited day of deliverance had finally dawned. The Jewish Messiah had come to them in a jeep! Lapid was carried into the home of Manduzio on the shoulders of the villagers. They took off his boots and kissed

his feet. They refused to sit in his presence.

Lieutenant Lapid was greatly embarrassed. He was quite sure that he was not the Messiah and he conveyed this information to the assembled group as gently as he could. He told them that he shared their Messianic hope, not in the form of a person but of a land. He asked them to join him and his fellow soldiers of the Jewish Brigade in their determination to establish a State of Israel in the Land of Israel.

From that moment on, the Manduzio fellowship was obsessed by only one desire: to live as Jews in the Land of Israel. Their ambition was not achieved easily. Even after 1948, after the State of Israel was no longer just a dream, the Israeli authorities were not overly sympathetic to the idea of bringing the San Nicandro proselytes to Israel. After all, there were so many "real" Jews who were homeless and who needed to come to Israel. Why bring in these "Jews" whose Jewishness might or might not be genuine and who had a home of their own? Who knows what improper motivations might lie behind this unusual and incomprehensible aspiration?

But ex-Lieutenant Lapid of the Jewish Brigade, now an official in Israel's Foreign Ministry, kept insisting that these were genuine *gerey tsedek* and should be admitted to Israel under the nation's law that any Jew who desires to settle in the Holy Land must be given permission to do so. In 1950 the long sought permission was granted and the group left Italy for Israel. Their departure was marked by a deep sorrow. Shortly before they were scheduled to leave San Nicandro, their beloved leader, Donato Manduzio, died. Like Moses of old, he had led them to the threshold of the Promised Land but did not enter it with them.

Seventy-three persons, including the village carpenter, shoemaker and policeman, migrated from San Nicandro to Israel. Because they follow the ways of the Bible, they attempted to sacrifice a white lamb upon their safe arrival in the harbor of Haifa and were only prevented from doing so by the local officials after a lengthy multi-lingual argument. They settled in the village of Alma in northern Galilee, about five miles from the Lebanese border. Here they completed the formality of officially converting to Judaism and took

Hebrew names. They soon showed such dexterity with the plough and the hoe that their less dextrous Jewish neighbors gave them the nickname of "Green Fingers." They continue to this day to set up outdoor altars on appropriate occasions and offer animal sacrifices thereon. In this and many other ways they follow literally the Law of Moses, as they understand it.

In 1953, villager number seventy-four arrived. He was a male child, a son born to Abraham (formerly Giacomo) Mattoni, the shoemaker's son, and Miriam (formerly Maria) Mattoni, neé Bonfite, the innkeeper's daughter. The child was named Pinchas in honor of his godfather, San Nicandro's "Messiah."

A report which came out of Israel a few years ago states that the villagers of Alma now have a new ambition and desire: To establish a Jewish house of worship and community center in the Italian village of San Nicandro and to train some of their children to return to the village to staff this synagogue-center for the purpose of converting to Judaism the remaining inhabitants of San Nicandro.

* * * *

And so, being by this time well aware that, throughout all of Jewish history up to and including our own day, non-Jewish individuals, humble and great, have knocked continuously for admittance upon the doors of the Synagogue, we come to, perhaps, the most important section of this entire book, the section in which some contemporary converts will speak for themselves. Most of their statements have already appeared in print elsewhere and, where this is so, the original source will be indicated. These converts are persons who come from a wide variety of religious and social backgrounds and are presently engaged in a wide variety of occupations. The quality of the statements ranges from the simple and direct to the deeply philosophic and highly intellectual. Each statement represents the attempt of an honest and sincere individual to explain to himself or to herself and to the world the manner in which he or she was attracted to Judaism and the values which he or she has found in Judaism. It may also be taken for granted that each statement was written with the hope that it might serve to

strengthen Jewish religious loyalties and might offer a guiding light to some who now walk in the twilight zone of spiritual confusion and uncertainty.

AWAKENED

by

MARGARET MCKENZIE ABRAMS

These passages are taken from Margaret Abram's first novel, *Awakened*, published in 1954 by the Jewish Publication Society of America. *Awakened* is based on the life story of the late Rabbi Arthur Bluhm of Amarillo, Texas, the rabbi who converted Mrs. Abrams to Judaism. The passages selected reveal some of Mrs. Abrams' thoughts with regard to her own conversion experience. Two more novels by Mrs. Abrams, *The Uncle* and *Seasons of the Heart*, have been published recently by Houghton Mifflin and Company. A picture based on *The Uncle* was made in England in the summer of 1964 and has just been released in the United States. Mrs. Abrams lives in Amarillo, is on the staff of Radio Station KGNC and writes feature articles for the Amarillo *Sunday News Globe*. In her "spare time," she continues to write successful novels.

Rabbi Rosen began to read from the prayer book, and Lee tried to listen to what he was saying. In his voice, as in his wife's face, was the answer to what she sought; but here, too, the answer was a spiritual essence which must be captured and defined. Lee felt the loneliness of her own unknowing heart.

Numbly Lee read the parts of the service that were in English, and listened to the parts that were in Hebrew

Shema Yisrael Adonoi Elohenu Adonoi Echod;
Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

God . . . what was God? Lee felt the stirring of memories that ached in her. . . . What was God? . . . The innocence of a child, the yearning of an adult? There comes a time when you have to believe, not just vaguely, but with some awesome intensity. . . .

Rabbi Rosen began to speak again, and the first words did not portend to Lee the magnificence of the moment at whose brink she stood. But the first words laid a stillness upon her heart so that it did not resist.

With a quiet, pervading dignity, the rabbi read

Wrapt in the sacred stillness of the sanctuary and filled with the consciousness of God's presence, we turn away from things of earth to contemplate the mysterious nature of our inner being, and to capture and to hold the heavenly vision revealed to our soul. We know that not with eyes of flesh nor with power of mind can we see and grasp the sublime truths of eternity. It is given to the soul alone to find, to feel and to know the living spirit that pervades and animates all. We are floating in an immeasurable ocean of spirit; and, in this house of worship, as we bow our heads in prayer with serene mind and yearning heart, the tides of the infinite come with mighty pulsations throbbing through our soul. Spirit touches spirit. We are face to face with God.

As Rabbi Rosen finished speaking, Lee did not move; she hardly breathed. It was as if she spiritually was on tiptoe, waiting. . . .

* * * *

. . . . She opened the door [of the synagogue] and almost timidly hesitated just inside the doorway. The room lay in the slumbering quiet of the glow from the Eternal Light.

The Light imparted an even deeper stillness to the room. Its glow bathed in a soft radiance the empty pulpit and laid a sheen upon the velvet curtain of the Ark. Its touch and its silence were upon the front rows of seats. Its boundaries were not defined by walls; they blended into darkness before walls were met. . . .

Lee sat down in one of the back rows of seats. She felt strangely stirred. In her mind there welled up the familiar question, urgent and unanswered. What was Judaism? . . . A belief in God? . . . a belief in God which confronts the invincible spirit with its own vincibility . . . a belief in God which is aware, and sometimes anguished, and often exultant . . . and profound.

Judaism was this . . . and more . . . much more. It was a way of feeling about life. Lee thought of Rabbi Rosen and of how each time he sent her away it had been to reach a deeper level of understanding. So stern and demanding a thing it was, which, at the same time, held such a gentleness for human fallibility. . . . It was a concept that confronted the limited imaginations of men with a sense of their own immortality so that the goal of their striving was ever contained within themselves, their living link with God. . . .

THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE

by

MARY RUTH BONDARIN

This is a sermon delivered by Mrs. Bondarin at Temple Sinai, Forest Hills, L. I., N. Y., on the Eve of the Sabbath, Friday, January 31, 1958.

Whither thou goest will I go; where thou lodgest will I lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God.

Thus spoke Ruth, a young woman, a Moabitess, who chose to leave her land and her heritage and to go to Judea, not blindly obsessed by love for a man but moved by the tenderly nurtured love for a mother-in-law, her way of life and her people.

I, too, am a Ruth. I chose to come as a stranger to the people of Israel. Here I have found a home, a people and a way of life which I cherish. Being a Jew by choice, I have an enviable spiritual strength. I have no secret doubts about my heritage, about what I might have been; no regrets about what I am or must be; what I have I sought, I examined, I accepted; I took it to myself as mine, my Faith.

My childhood religion had been an every-Sunday-morning Sunday School kind of experience, with hours spent in choir practice, youth groups, roller skating, potluck suppers and all the other frostings of a highly organized congregation, one in which my parents were quite active. Although I had a wonderful spiritual leader (who regarded my conversion to Judaism as an excellent way to fulfill my particular religious needs), my many questions did not find satisfying answers. There was no real religious significance to my Christian affiliation. I could not honestly say "I believe," "I have faith," as one is supposed to do.

My search for an acceptable answer led me to a university course

in comparative religions, where I was greatly impressed by Judaism, the universality of its concepts, its rich roots which nourished so many later religions, its incomparable ethical standards. I felt drawn to it.

Unlike the Biblical Ruth, love for a man played its part in my final decision. I was in love with a wonderful Jew. His fine qualities, the result of a goodly Jewish heritage, exemplified in reality what the university course had revealed in theory.

I spent a summer vacation in the mountains with my parents, reading and studying about Judaism, wondering, marvelling, rejoicing. My parents, who were great admirers of my husband-to-be, read and learned about Judaism with me. When I had made up my mind to convert, my father and mother said to me, "If these are the principles and mores which you accept, let there be full acceptance. Take them openly and with pride. If there is genuine conviction, you cannot fail to be a credit both to us and to the faith of Israel." So my coming into Judaism was both from the mind and from the heart.

I came to Judaism because of

the simplicity of its affirmations concerning God and man and their eternal relationship and its teaching that to love God truly is to have compassion for one's fellowmen;

the genuine one-ness of its God, the closeness of God, no intermediary, no mystic concepts or dogma, a God Who is a source of spiritual power and personal strength;

Judaism's concern for social justice, communal improvement, the desire to help others in time of need;

the reverence for tradition, the meaningful family rituals and prayers, the inner security of being a people as well as a religion;

the flexibility of this liberal religion, seasoned with reason and experience yet able to meet the changing needs of time and circumstance;

the intellectual atmosphere of the Synagogue, the leadership

and learning of its dedicated rabbis, the freedom of thought, the latitude with regard to creed, the respect for the integrity of the thinking individual, the absence of any doctrine of salvation "for Jews only";

the spirit of optimism, that life right here and now is blessed and good and that the future holds hope of even better things and that one's rewards are in and of this life, attitudes particularly significant to one who has been reared in a creed which negates the goodness and blessedness of the here-and-now.

Through my study and interest in Temple affairs, my husband found his own Judaism becoming more meaningful than ever before. This dedication reached the point where Av decided to devote himself professionally to the cause of Reform Judaism. From the very beginning of our marriage, we involved ourselves deeply in synagogal affairs. Up to this year, I have taught continuously in the religious school. I well remember with what trepidation I attended my first Sisterhood meeting and how important to my personal happiness was the warm welcome I received. My mother-in-law, unlike the Biblical Naomi, did not, at first, give me full acceptance, because she had been reared in a Jewish tradition which was violently opposed to intermarriage. Slowly, as I proved that I was sincerely dedicated to the Jewish way of life, she was able to be more genuinely supportive of our marriage. Now she extols me to her friends as being "closer than a daughter" to her, although she still feels that I am an exception among converts.

I am teaching in a public school on Long Island where they have hired Jewish teachers only within the past few years. I take pride in being recognized and respected as a representative of our faith and in the opportunity I have to help develop better understanding between Jew and non-Jew.

Wouldn't I miss my former faith, my former holidays? some asked. I find the Jewish holidays, divorced as they are from commercialism and based on events of historical significance, very satisfying. And how can one who once accepted Jesus be a Jew?—And what was Jesus but a Jew? And what was the basis for his

teachings but Judaism? Yes, the teachings of Jesus stem from Judaism, but Judaism consists of these teachings plus. And this plus is, for me, a very big plus.

Some say that an intermarriage has less chance for happiness than the normal marriage, that it adds another area of adjustment to married life. I say that, if two people have common interests and common goals and know "togetherness" in many ways, this added adjustment can actually bring them closer to each other as together they try to be a significant part of the Jewish people. I have found great happiness in my marriage and I feel that our spiritual oneness has been an important factor in that happiness.

And so I end, as I began, with an appropriate quotation from the Book of Ruth

And all the people that were in the gate and the elders said to Boaz: "May the Lord make this woman that is come into thy house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did labor faithfully to build up the House of Israel."

SO STRANGE MY PATH

by

ABRAHAM ISAAC CARMEL

The passages quoted here are taken from the American edition of Mr. Carmel's autobiography, *So Strange My Path*, published by the Bloch Publishing Company in 1964. Abraham Isaac Carmel was born in London, England, in 1911 as Kenneth Charles Cox. He was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1943. Because of his doubts about the divinity of Jesus, he left the priesthood after a few years. Drawn toward Orthodox Judaism, he was converted to Judaism in 1953 by the Beth Din of the Chief Rabbi of London. He lived and worked in Israel from 1959 to 1961. Since then, he has resided in the United States. He is an instructor in the Department of English of the Yeshiva of Flatbush High School, Brooklyn, New York. Mr. Carmel is in great demand as a lecturer before both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.

. . . . As time went on and I maintained my serious reading, I discovered more and more sound reasons for returning to the original faith out of which both Christianity and Islam had grown. I retained a profound respect and admiration for Jesus and his followers, and I fully recognized the many praiseworthy episodes in the history of the Church. Beyond this, however, I could not go. The notion of the Eternal King of the Universe becoming a human baby, beautiful as I felt it to be, was to my thinking outside the bounds of acceptance. The idea of directing any form of worship to a created being, no matter how saintly he or she might have been, became utterly repugnant to me. And as my appreciation of the infinite nature of God developed, so did I find all forms of religion which failed to conform to a strictly monotheistic standard unworthy of credence. Coincidentally with the increasing direction of all my fervour to God Himself, I became aware of a knitting together of my personality, so to speak, and the assumption of an inner unity and power such as I had never previously known.

Nevertheless, I realized that this monotheistic conception by no

means represented Judaism in its entirety. My researches had shown me, in fact, that Judaism, while monotheistic in a strict sense of the word, was less a creed than a way of life; every action throughout the livelong day was linked in one way or another to Judaism. If I was to be a Jew I could not merely believe in One God and leave it at that; the Unitarian Church did as much. On the contrary, I would have to live in the manner prescribed for Jews when the Law was given to Moses on Sinai. The Dietary Laws and those concerned with observance of the Sabbath were fundamental. Moreover, it was essential that I be circumcised. . . .

. . . . First and foremost among the features of Judaism which my studies had taught me to admire, I think, was its intense practicality. Thoughts of the world to come were not permitted to distract the Jew from fulfilling as completely as possible his mission here on earth. Jews did not simply sit passive and wait for the Messiah to come, for if they did so He would not come. His coming could only be hastened by *mitzvot*—their own good works. A hymn on the lines of "O Paradise, O Paradise, 'tis weary waiting here" could find no place on a Jewish tongue.

Then there was that splendid, robust principle of assuming undivided personal responsibility for one's actions. I had so often felt that the dual aspect of religious life among Catholics, with devout piety and the commission of mortal sins seeming to share so paradoxical a co-existence, stemmed from their undue reliance on the sacramental system, whereby much personal responsibility to God was either absolved or transferred to others—priests, saints, or the Virgin. Judaism, by contrast, insists that its follower shall give his whole heart, soul, and mind to the Eternal Creator. The Jew must stand upright on his own two feet before the Judge of all. He has no patron saints to plead his cause, no Father Confessor to grant indulgences, absolutions, or dispensations. He is, in the fullest sense, the "master of his fate, the captain of his soul." He neither has, nor asks for, any intermediary to bear his brief before the Judge of Heaven. Each man is his own barrister. He must plead his own cause, with a sincere heart that is truly repentant, to God alone.

Judaism does not and cannot offer any season tickets to Heaven

at reduced prices. Every pilgrim travels under his own steam, so to speak. The Jew believes that he, as all men, has sufficient will power, assisted by prayer, to resist any evil inclination. He does not require an extravagant sacramental system, born of human ingenuity rather than of divine revelation, to snatch him from the fires of God's anger. And a Jew either gives all to God or does not bother with external religion at all. He does not bargain with God for special terms. Whatever his failings may be—and many Jews do fail grievously, it cannot be denied—he at least does not whine about God's asking too much of him. He strikes his breast and confesses, "I have sinned and fallen short." Even on the great Day of Atonement, it is clearly understood, however, that only the sins directly against God are thus forgiven. Sins committed against his neighbor are forgiven only after he has begged his neighbor's forgiveness, and he must, if necessary, ask often. The Catholic Christian, on the other hand, can harm his neighbor, go to Confession, make a sincere act of contrition, and receive forgiveness forthwith. He can still complacently go his way without begging pardon of the injured neighbor.

These and many other outstanding characteristics of Judaism filled me with eagerness to embrace it with all speed.

* * * *

For myself, I found the daily practice of Judaism perfectly natural and yet sublime. As time went on I came to feel just the same as any other Jew, free now from that earlier sensation of being a "stranger." I regarded myself, in fact, as being as good a Jew as most, and perhaps a better one than many. I had learned to take a knock and give one in return. Whereas a few years ago I had been afraid of every eye cast upon me, I arrived at a point where I found myself pulling apart certain aspects of Jewry and thoroughly enjoying the pastime—a pastime in which . . . I still engage without fear or favour where circumstances seem to call for it. But let no non-Jew criticize the Community in my presence, or he will soon know precisely where my sympathies lie.

More and more I found complete composure of soul and spiritual

unity in my new faith and way of life. Those perpetual conflicts of mind, heart, and soul which had so grievously tormented me in my former sphere had been exorcised by the undivided union with God I now experienced. The mind was happy that it had no incompatible acts of faith to accept; the heart was at peace because it was no longer split; and the soul soared aloft to Him no longer obstructed by a dissipation of prayer offered to more than The One Being. I felt that the King and Father of the universe was now the centre of my life and that no barrier existed any more to diminish the bond of union between Creator and creature, between the King and His subject. In short, I knew that the peace of mind which I had found was of a permanent nature, it being rooted in a faith which presented no conflict to my mind. Although Judaism was a revealed religion—the oldest, in fact, of the directly revealed faiths—I could discover in it nothing, which, though above reason, was contrary thereto, nothing which offended my conception of God.

I found, too, in the serene, untroubled atmosphere of my new faith, that I was able to meditate more objectively upon so many questions that had harassed me at one time or another in the past, and in many cases to arrive at more rational answers than had formerly characterized my thinking. . . .

TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

by

MARGARET RUTH JACQUES

Margaret Ruth (Mrs. Michell) Jacques is a member of Congregation Keneseth Israel of Philadelphia, Pa. She was converted to Judaism by its rabbi, Dr. Bertram W. Korn. When asked to describe her "official" connection with the congregation, she replied, "I am a former member of the Religious School Board and a former member of the PTA Board. I am a lay-reader of daily Services, a responsibility I dearly love. . . . I would be much more active in the Congregation were it not for my full time employment in the book world. I am an editor and proofreader for a typesetting firm, having been trained for such work by Dr. Korn and Dr. Maurice Jacobs. Among my responsibilities has been that of serving as proofreader for the Yearbook of the Central Conference of American Rabbis." The statements of Mrs. Jacques will be presented in two parts: first, a previously unpublished article, titled *To Thine Own Self Be True* and written a number of years after her conversion; and second, a number of quotations from letters written to Dr. Eichhorn by Mrs. Jacques.

To gain a full understanding of the shock it was to my parents for me to renounce Catholicism, one must have some knowledge of the tenor of my early religious life. I was not a child who was indifferent to religion. I consistently went beyond what was expected of a practicing Catholic. In my very young years, from about the age of nine through my fourteenth year, I arose daily at six a.m. in order to attend Mass before school began. This was not a question of conforming to the practices of my family. It was something that I wanted to do. I am certain that had I expressed a desire for convent life, it would have come as no surprise to my parents.

Without going into needless detail about the doctrines of Catholicism, I will say simply that my years in high school, filled with impassable doubts, culminated in my renunciation of Catholicism in its entirety at the age of seventeen. During my years in high

school I became conscious of an outside force trying to change what I believed about God and life and myself, a force against which I was compelled to defend myself. I sought refuge in my faith to strengthen me against this intruder, and the deeper I burrowed into the teachings of Catholicism the clearer was my vision, until, finally, I recognized the intruder to be Catholicism itself! Somewhere, somehow, I had formed my *own* beliefs, different from any I had ever been taught, and they were too strong to permit me to continue professing a faith which was in direct opposition to them. There was no alternative except to tell my parents.

In retrospect, it is difficult for me to appreciate what this decision meant for a sensitive, warmhearted Catholic daughter. I knew what my action would do to my parents. I saw the bewilderment and displeasure with which my three brothers, and all my friends, would begin to regard me. But this was, above all, a matter between God and myself. Religion is not something to be practiced out of habit or because of respect for one's relatives. My first duty, as I saw it, was not to my parents and brothers and friends but to God and to myself

This above all:

To thine own self be true.

And it shall follow, as the night the day,

That thou canst not then be false to any man.

My faith in God and in my own values would have to be enough.

It is difficult to describe the atmosphere that this revelation created in my home. Looking back, I could perhaps liken it to a situation where parents, having what they think is a perfectly healthy child, suddenly find themselves confronted with a child who is desperately ill. I did not possess the faculty to prove to my family that I was not the least bit sick in body, in mind or in heart.

Trouble is the test of inner goodness. The longer I live, the more I realize how good my parents were to me in the face of their own bitter disappointment and much unkind criticism. People were not averse to telling them what they would do "if she were mine!" I had steelled myself for the worst possible consequences, failing to comprehend how wonderful my parents really were. Once they were

certain that this was my own decision, that I was not under the influence of a "crazy boy friend" or some other undesirable companion, and that I was willing to abide by this decision before God, they relinquished all religious jurisdiction over me and permitted me to remain in their home, living in my own fashion. Strangely enough, this hurt me more than if they had disowned me, since it made me realize how wonderful the parents were to whom I had brought great heartache.

I remained at home for another three or four years, until my marriage to a Jewish man. During this time, the absolute avoidance of any kind of religious discussion had become an imbedded family pattern, and my marriage, therefore, created no new disturbance for my parents. However, it did revive a great deal of unrest within me. In my own home now, separated from my parents, I was able to see my own spiritual incompleteness. I was no longer comfortable with the "not being a Catholic" to which I had adjusted over the years. It was now very obvious that there was no order to my life. My home without religious observance was a cold place in which to live. I needed a tangible spiritual life, something I could share with my husband, something I could impart to any children we might have. Perhaps, if I looked zealously enough, I could find a faith which would not be in disagreement with my own nameless one.

I began with an examination of Judaism, which, since it was my husband's (dormant) faith, was the logical point to begin. I studied for over a year, discovering, much to my surprise and delight, that my personal beliefs were not peculiar to me at all but were the beliefs of the Jewish people.

This meant to me only one thing: I had been, I was unknowingly, spiritually and intellectually, Jewish! Little wonder that I had been unable to accept Catholicism! Recognizing that I was already a Jew religiously, I determined to become part of the Jewish people. This act, this becoming part of a people whose spiritual ideals I shared for so many years in solitude was, for me, an experience of coming home at long last in joyful self-justification. . . .

* * * *

All things considered, I had been very fortunate. The adjustment had been made without upset, or so I believed; the difference in religions had not jeopardized the ties which bound me to my parents. I was now ready to shout to the world that, if you are strong and steadfast, if you are content to progress slowly toward mutual understanding, giving everyone an opportunity to become accustomed to a situation, you will achieve your highest goals of complete religious freedom in thought, word and deed!

I was wrong. . . .

During a Sabbath evening service in the Temple, I became ill, lost consciousness and awakened the following morning in a nearby hospital. There was a medical explanation for this illness that kept me confined in bed for several weeks; but, for my mother, there was only one real explanation: God was angry at me. No other explanation for my prolonged weakness and continued loss of weight would satisfy her. Proof positive was the fact that I had lost consciousness in a synagogue. In her frightened mind, she was convinced that I was dying. Her torment is almost unbearable to recall

You will never get well without God! You have angered Him greatly, and He has cast you out of a house of worship which He has not sanctioned! Please listen to me, child. Come back to your faith. Come back to His Church where you belong. Everything will be alright. God is forgiving. If you don't fall on your knees and ask forgiveness for your sins, you will die without God. I'm going to send your brother for the priest. If you die without absolution, you will suffer the tortures of Hell. This is *my* fault. I'm the one to blame. I never should have allowed you to leave the Church. You were too young to know what you were doing. I should have locked you in a room until you came to your senses. O, dear God, don't take her! Margie, listen to me; child, are you listening?

I was listening, listening to the voice of the Catholic Church hammering out its doleful message through the wracked sobs of my mother. . . . I replied

Please don't cry, Mom. I'm going to get well; you'll see. God is not punishing me. You can't go on interpreting every physical upset as a direct intercession by God. I'm sick simply because I did not take care of myself. This could have happened that night no matter where I had

been—even in a cathedral—anywhere. My being Jewish does not anger God. He is just and merciful and loving to every human being on the face of the earth. I don't believe that God is a Catholic, Mom. It sounds so foolish to even say it. God is not a Catholic or anything else except God. Every religion is good in His eyes for those who believe in it. But He has only one set of rules, Mom. I cannot live by the Catholic Church's interpretations of those rules. I can only live by my own interpretation which, it just so happens, is also the Jewish interpretation. I am Jewish simply because I could never be anything else! Please try to understand, Mom. This is not just Judaism. *This is my own belief.* If anything ever happened to Bud, I would remain exactly as I am now. You must not hope that I will ever return to the Catholic Church. You have your way to serve God and I have mine. They are different. Your way is right for you because *you* believe in it. My way is right for me because *I* believe in it. As far as my children are concerned, I have a duty to God to train them in Judaism as you trained me in Catholicism. When I have done this duty, I shall have fulfilled my religious responsibility to my children as you fulfilled your responsibility to me. We cannot decide which of us is right and which is wrong, Mom. Judging is God's responsibility and must be left to Him.

I shall never forget the wise words of my dearest friend, my rabbi, when I told him about this. He said, "Never mind playing the theologian. Just get well!" The return of my health brought quietness to my mother's heart. She finally realized that God had not cast me aside.

This all seems to have happened a long time ago and to someone else. It is hard for me to believe that God loved me enough to try me so. Actually, it was more of an honor than a trial. Every tear brought keener understanding and deeper faith. . . . Through life's experiences, the Master Teacher instructs us. This I have learned, as has every member of my family, Jew and gentile. We have a closeness today which I believe is possible only because I live a life of true Jewishness. It matters not to me that my mother is content to think of it as "that good Christian feeling." What is important to me is that we are a family in the finest sense, joined together by ties of genuine love and respect.

To everything there is a season,
And a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
A time to maintain silence, and a time to speak;

A time for conflict, and a time for peace.

* * * *

October 27, 1961

... I would like to share with you a little speech which I have made many times *silently*

Don't bend over backwards to welcome me as a Jew; I don't need it. Don't point me out as a convert; I don't want it. Don't tell me how good a Jew I am; you are not my judge. Don't admire my greater knowledge of Judaism; it is not to my credit, but to your shame.

My personal beliefs are not your concern, and it would be better if you would reserve comment on them. The mentality with which to weigh facts and decide is all the support that I need. The love of my chosen faith is all the incentive that I need. The freedom to serve God in my chosen way is all the reward that I need. Befriend me, if you will, because I am a human being, not because I am a Jew. I want to *earn* my friends—not *inherit* them.

* * * *

November 1, 1964

... The many questions that are asked of a convert to Judaism have an undercurrent of "How different from Jews does a convert feel?"

A sense of belonging is something that no one can give you. You either have it or you don't. If you have it, Jews reflect it. If you don't, they reflect that, too. People mirror your feelings. When converts complain that Jews do not accept them, I believe that this is merely a transference feeling; they themselves do not feel at home and they blame others rather than themselves. You cannot hide confidence. It oozes out of you. So does the lack of it. Acceptance of a faith is a very personal experience involving God and one individual. Family approval is of secondary concern. Approval or understanding of friends is also of secondary concern. Whether or not the convert encounters warmth or hostility, imagined or unimagined, has no bearing on his acceptance of a faith and his learning and developing. When a convert has come to Judaism because he wants it for his very own and he encounters

unmistakably cutting remarks, he knows that those making these remarks do not understand that the sense of belonging is not theirs to give or to withhold. I do not believe that any man or woman who has accepted Judaism out of a belief in its beautiful truths, out of love for its reservoir of strength and inspiration and courage to face life's problems, has ever wasted much time worrying about whether or not he has been "accepted." . . .

Conversion is so complex. Like everything else deeply meaningful, it goes all the way back to the cradle. Conversion, true conversion, is a final peace, a justification for the long struggle to attain one's God-given right to freedom of soul. It is no sudden thing—no glamorous, romantic, exciting discovery. . . . When it comes, it is a very still and quiet time. It was for me. It still is. Most people do not understand this and, fortunately, it is not necessary that they should understand.

When I think about Judaism seeking converts, I can't help but feel that Judaism has never been interested in quantity. Judaism, as the religion of a minority, has outlived entire civilizations and cultures and religions. I pay little attention to the babblings of those who worry about its disappearance. Judaism has always been available to those who seek it and want it. The doors have never been closed. No one who is willing to accept Jewish responsibilities, who is willing to spend the days of his life fulfilling Jewish ideals, has ever been denied this opportunity. I cannot see the point in Judaism seeking converts. Truth is truth. You don't have to push it. I think I'd go along with Jeremiah

And ye shall seek Me and ye shall find Me
When ye search for Me with all your heart.

. . . . Judaism is the greatest gift that God has ever bestowed upon me. It is my sight, my ability to hear, my capacity to feel joy and pain, the gauge by which I measure the value of every living thing. And being a Jew is its own reward . . . because I firmly believe that the true nature of Judaism is such that the spiritual benefits of Judaism come only to him who earns and deserves them. . . .

* * * *

December 14, 1964

. . . . A very exciting thing has happened since our last exchange of letters. I have been asked to represent Keneseth Israel for three consecutive Sundays in January at a local Unitarian Church school, teaching a brief course in Judaism to an eighth grade class of young people. I have reread Abba Hillel Silver's *Where Judaism Differed?* (why the past tense, I've wondered?) and many study guides to various texts I own and I have made the necessary lesson-plan outlines. Dr. Korn said to me many years ago about teaching, that one does not teach Jewish history or Jewish ethics or Jewish holy day observances—one teaches *people*. So, with questions and answers in hand, I am looking forward eagerly to my first teaching assignment, reminding myself that it is an opportunity to teach *children*. As I dwelt on the subject of missionary work, it suddenly occurred to me that only weeks ago I wrote to you my objections concerning a missionary movement within Judaism—and yet, as I prepare an explanation of Judaism for these youngsters, I realize that, if I am to tell the truth, I must show them that Judaism is the greatest missionary faith in all the world, that faith which gave to the world its belief in the One God! Obviously, there is much learning and growing yet before me. . . .

I ADDED A POINT TO MY STAR

by

MARGARET RUTH NEAL

Margaret Neal is the professional name of a young lady, a musician and a writer, who was converted to Judaism in Tulsa, Oklahoma, some years ago without marriage being involved in any way. At the time, Miss Neal was a member of the strings section of the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra. After her conversion, she taught for a time in the religious school of Temple Israel of Tulsa. She now lives in New York City, "happily married to a wonderful Unitarian," and works as a writer for a Madison Avenue advertising agency. The article reproduced here was published in the *Jewish Digest* in February 1959.

"How could you give up your wonderful heritage of fine Christian teachings?"

I have been asked that question countless times in tones of voice varying from the most sincere to the most shocked, disbelieving, and unpleasantly condemning. It used to be very hard for me to reply. I did not want to hurt the sincere person; at the same time, I wanted to quiet the one who asked in an obvious attempt to hurt me. Now that I have become so used to the question, I answer, "I have given up nothing. I have only added a point to my star."

The Magen David I wear around my neck lets all who meet me know that I am proud to be a Jew. Of this I want to shout from the hilltops. But being Jewish is a privilege I feel the necessity of earning over and over again. Partly because being considered a part of the Jewish people is so precious to me and partly because, in this age more than any before it, a person who was born Jewish has been forced to pay such a terrible price for his Jewishness by a part of the people among whom I was born. Such a price has never been asked of me.

As a result, Jewishness is a thing I seem never quite able to

attain fully. I find myself, even now, referring to the Jewish people as "they"; my cup of joy would be full to overflowing if I could ever feel worthy enough to say, freely and out loud, "we."

And yet, oddly, no Jew, upon finding that I am a convert to Judaism, has ever said, "Oh, then you're not *really* Jewish." Only Gentiles have said that to me. Every Jewish group of which I have been a part and almost every individual Jew has welcomed me with open arms. They have tried to make me feel that I am a part of their spiritual family. And what is Judaism if it is not family? It is Judaism which has given me a profounder appreciation of my own flesh-and-blood family.

I went through a long period, before finding Judaism, in which I hated the very concept of organized religion. I saw in organized religion many evils and that much wrong was done in its name. So I determined to go my religious way by myself, alone. I still see much that is inherently wrong in organized religion. There are also inherent evils in democracy and in family living, but this does not make me a protagonist of communism or of dictatorship, and I do not espouse the philosophy of polygamy or preach the upbringing of all children in communal orphanages.

I came to realize finally that I was like a lone soul standing in the middle of a forsaken field with a high fence around me. I was saying to all the philosophies and teachings of those who have dedicated their lives to studying moral and spiritual values, "Don't come in—You're wrong—You're worthless." And I said this, as so many do, without even opening the covers of the books which contain these philosophies and teachings. I was a fool! I have opened the books, and what a spiritual wealth I now have from which to develop my own outlook on life.

Some of what I read or hear I dispute heatedly. In that sense, I feel a little like the searching *talmid*, student, all Jews are encouraged to be by their tradition, their intellectual heritage, their Talmud, which says even to itself, "Oh, no, you're wrong—It's this way"—as Rabbi after Rabbi proceeds to set forth what he believes to be the truth, although his truth is not always consistent with that of the Rabbi who has spoken on the same subject just

ahead of him.

As a Jew, I have been encouraged to discuss and question and even argue many religious points with the most brilliant rabbis. In doing so I am exercising what is, to me, the most precious privilege and obligation of Judaism: The command to think, to learn, to question everything until I find what is, for me at least, the truth. For this I use the one thing God gave me which makes me not just an animal but rather an animal created in His image. This gift of God is my heart, my soul, my spirit, my conscience. It is my mind, my power of reason. Just to have it is a great boon. To use it well is a profound obligation, an obligation I feel most deeply by identifying myself with the faith of the Jewish people.

This is why I am so moved when I read volumes written in our time which continue the tradition of the Talmudists and the Midrashists. In them, God speaks of man to man through man. Since I am by training and profession a musician, the easiest way for me to illustrate what I mean is to say: Man builds musical instruments and plays them to make them speak in a way he himself wants to speak but cannot. And man finds the language of a violin or a trumpet—or a *shofar*—a very valuable language. I think God finds the language we speak with our minds rather than with our tongues a very valuable language too. And I do not think He wants His instruments to stop speaking for Him before or after any particular moment in human history. Or that He considers the words of one era more or less valuable than those of another. The Torah is God's word—but it is God's word spoken through man. To canonize these words is fine, but to end all search for spiritual knowledge with that canonization is a crime. Sacred books should still be written. Sacred volumes should increase as the knowledge of man increases.

You will understand now why to many who ask, I say, "If Judaism were only another one of those religions claiming to have *the* truth, I wouldn't have bothered." A religion which is less than a continual search for a more meaningful way of life is, for me, not worth the having. It is not really a religion then—it is just

some human being's best guess, just another harmful superstition. And a truly religious way of life inherently includes the right to individuality, and just as surely excludes exclusiveness.

This ceaseless desire to search for truth is only a part of what my wanting to be Jewish means to me. Couple it with my love of Jewish music, of Jewish literature and Jewish culture, with the memories of Temple Israel in Tulsa, where I was converted and welcomed with such warmth, and my ninth grade religious school class which I taught there and which challenged my every word and taught me so much, and my tears when I read and hear Jewish humor, my taste for Jewish foods, and my pride when I hear, read or see Jewish accomplishments, my fascination when I study Jewish history and my wonder when I look at the miracle nation of Israel today—Put this all together and perhaps you will understand why I love them so—this Jewish people and their religion whom I have adopted and whom I have asked to adopt me.

MORE THAN CONVERTED—CONVINCED

by

FRANCES PRICE

Mrs. Price is a past president of the Sisterhood of Congregation Beth Israel of Camden, New Jersey. This statement which she wrote was first printed in the *Women's League Outlook* of the National Women's League of the United Synagogue of America and was then reprinted in the *Jewish Digest* in April 1958. In granting permission for the use of the article in this book, Mrs. Price wrote, "I shall deem it an honor to have an article in such a volume. Your request brings back many pleasant memories of the days when I discovered the joy of becoming a member of the household of Israel. I can only say that, after having lived as a Jew for about thirteen years now and having been active in synagogal and Jewish community life during all these years, I would never return to my previous gentile life."

It is not as a convert to Judaism but as a very proud Jewess that I write. Even though I was born into the world of the Gentile and have only comparatively recently become a Jew, I hesitate to use the term "convert" since I feel in no way converted to Judaism. What I really feel is that I have "come home."

Coming into Judaism is a stimulating experience. One does not find it the end of a search but the beginning of a mental and spiritual journey. Judaism does not say, "I am the way." The convert must seek and find Judaism with all its traditions, its ancient yet ever new teachings, and its depths of spiritual truth.

Born and raised in a Gentile world, living in a Christian atmosphere, having had the usual schooling in Christianity, I lived a pleasant and satisfying life. I traveled about with a wide circle of friends, enjoying social contacts with both Jews and Gentiles. Christian creeds did not interest me very much, as I found too many unfathomables in their teachings. As I grew older, I arrived at a philosophy satisfactory to me, but hardly in keeping with my

earlier Christian training.

My entrance into Judaism dates from the beginning of my small son's religious education. I had married a Jew and had been living happily with him for many years, experiencing no need of affiliating with Judaism or, for that matter, with any religion. When our son was born, we had a *brit mila*, a circumcision ceremony, and that was the extent of our participation in Jewish tradition. My husband's family and all our Jewish friends were very pleasant people, exhibiting no prejudice at all where I was concerned. No pressure was put upon me to convert to Judaism.

When our son was five and had reached religious school age, I sent him to a synagogue near our home. My mind began to turn toward Judaism, not only for him but also for myself. I must admit that it was a purely academic thing with me. What makes a Jew a Jew? How does a Jew think? What are his traditions? These and many other questions nagged at me and, for the sake of my child's religious training, I wanted to know the answers. My quest for Jewish knowledge began.

I went to a rabbi and discussed my situation with him. Without his interest and understanding, I could never have arrived at the knowledge and love of Judaism that I possess today.

Becoming affirmatively Jewish was a gradual process with me. From a growing interest in the festivals and rituals, I went on to study something of the history, philosophy, culture and other phases of Judaism. Little by little, I could feel a cold analytical study turn into a warm interest and finally to a sincere love for what is now my way of life.

I have been asked by Jews and Gentiles alike, "What do you find in Judaism that makes you seem so happy and satisfied?" or "How can you *possibly* like being Jewish and living 'kosher' with all that that entails?" By such as probe more deeply, the question put is, "What in Judaism is most important to you?"

The last question is a difficult one to answer; but, if I had to choose just one word to encompass my feelings, that word would be "tradition," which to me is Judaism in all its glorious entirety. Tradition is the heart, the soul and the body of Judaism. It is

Torah, with all that that glorious word implies. It is the holy days, the glow of the Sabbath candles, the rituals in the synagogue, the wearing of the yarmelke and the tallit, the mezuza upon the door post, the Chanuka lights, the Sukka on the lawn. It is the firm structure of religious observance without which Judaism would be a weak, hollow shell. Everyone worships God in his heart but truly religious people need tradition as a specific blueprint for daily living. The sensations of the soul are not enough. The eyes must see and the hands must feel.

Jews, scattered abroad, bearing untold miseries and cruel afflictions, could not have endured had it not been for the mental and spiritual discipline of our tradition. The laws of the fathers have made the children strong and our tradition has kept them steadfast. Tradition has kept Hebrew in constant use as the universal language of the Jew. It is reflected in the poetry and song of the rites of the synagogue. It is in the joy of the student as the voice of the Rabbi teaches him the ancient way of life. The chant of the Chazan takes us back to the early days of our people, to pray and to dream and, sometimes, to cry with bygone generations.

And when I speak of tradition, I include our dietary laws. So very many people seem to feel that my having a kosher home is "old fashioned," "too religious" and almost anachronistic—out of tune with modern living. This attitude rather amazes me.

To me, following a kosher routine is one of the highlights of my Jewish life. It is one of the most important parts of this tradition of ours. It is my mark of distinction. It gives me a feeling of satisfaction to eat foods that bear the stamp of formal religious approval. I like knowing, when I serve meat at my table, that the animal not only was free of disease but felt no pain when it was slaughtered, and that the slaughtering was done by one both technically and religiously qualified. Surely a law that has been upheld through the ages, benefitting our people for so many centuries and keeping them united and distinctive, must still be upheld today regardless of the habits of the world around us.

In this wondrous religion of ours, I have found no teaching that cannot be explained rationally. Moreover, I like the freedom of

thought that our religion encourages. I like the responsibility given me to guide my spiritual life by my own conscience, the right given me to find God and visualize Him in a way that accords with my own degree of understanding. It is indeed a wonderful thing to raise a child to know and love a God Who will be with him always without implanting in the little mind the frightening specter of partial or eternal damnation.

Very early in my studies with the rabbi, he indicated to me how grievous my lot might be in my new affiliation. He told me that, from the time I entered Judaism, I would be exposed to the prejudices of uninformed non-Jews. I have since learned that, despite this persecution and ignorance, Judaism displays an amazing tolerance toward those not of the Jewish faith. It does not encourage those who have found God in other ways to change their religion. While it welcomes all who come into its fellowship of their own free will, it claims no monopoly on salvation.

How can I help but raise my head in pride as I pass by the mezuzah on my doorpost and enter the warmth and the beauty of *my* Jewish home, where lives *my* Jewish family?

No, I was not converted. I came seeking. I was informed. I was welcomed. I was convinced. I was home.

YIDDISH IS MY SECOND LOVE

by

CHANELE ROSENTHAL

Chanele Rosenthal was born on October 16, 1938, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, as Margaret Annette Engh. Her father was a Norwegian Lutheran and her mother was a Methodist of Scotch-Irish extraction. After her father had served in the Armed Forces during World War II and the Korean conflict, the family moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Annette first studied journalism at the University of Tulsa and then studied art at the University of New Mexico. In April, 1960, she married Maurice ("Moishe") M. Rosenthal, a stockbroker in Albuquerque, N. M. After marriage, her interest in Judaism was increased through the study of Yiddish. She was formally converted by Rabbi Abraham I. Shinedling and took the Jewish name "Chanele." Chanele and Moishe are planning to establish a boys' camp and adult cultural center where, to quote Chanele, "children and adults alike can enjoy an outdoor life combined with Yiddish theatre, lectures, and concerts." Chanele now paints and draws scenes and people inspired by characters in Sholom Aleichem's stories and other Yiddish literature. Her paintings have been exhibited at the New Mexico Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe and other art centers in the Southwest.

My conversion to Judaism was the beginning of a truly meaningful way of life for me. I refer not only to my religious conversion, but also to a cultural conversion that has enriched my life immeasurably.

As a Gentile in my adolescent years, I went through a period, which I find many young people going through, that of not quite believing anything or, at least, not knowing what to believe. I was searching for something credible upon which to stand and say, "This I believe," and mean it.

I received the basic religious indoctrination of the Lutheran faith: baptism, instruction, and confirmation. My parents and I attended church regularly and I went to Sunday School classes. I knew the liturgy by heart and attended my first communion with pride.

In high school I took an extra course outside the school in comparative religions and, in college, a required course called "The Origins and Principles of Christianity." I also read extensively about other creeds and attended several different churches, all with my parents' consent. They realized I was searching and they were willing to allow me to choose the denomination which I felt was best for me. However, they were not quite prepared for my leaving Christianity.

The questions I asked through high school and college about fundamental Christian doctrines were never answered satisfactorily. As a Christian, one seems to be required to put too much faith in the infallible guidance of the New Testament; all answers led back to "trust in Jesus." To me this was an oversimplification, a false panacea. Nor could I believe in the miraculous elements, such as that Jesus is the Son of God and the Virgin Birth and the Holy Trinity.

Many Christian denominations teach the doctrine of Original Sin, i.e., every child is born in sin and can only be "saved" through Christ. This sin was allegedly committed by Adam and Eve and has been inherited ever since by every human being. The whole feeling conveyed by the rituals and prayers of these denominations is one of the crushing weight of human guilt. I found this a degrading and incredible view of man's relation to his Creator.

After reaching intellectual maturity, I knew that I did not and could not honestly believe in the teachings or the rituals of the faith in which I had been reared.

Through my readings and observations I became interested in Judaism. Judaism is based on reason and understanding, not mysticism. It is ethical monotheism—a belief in one God combined with plausible ethical corollaries. A Jew enjoys a direct access to his God. There is just God and man, no intermediary. A Jew wakes up in the morning and says, "Good morning, God. Blessed art Thou Who hast created heaven and earth." Life is a partnership between God and man. If a Jew offends another person, he makes amends to that person and then asks God for forgiveness. In contrast, the Christian offender turns for his forgiveness to one

or more holy intercessors and, sometimes, to a vast apparatus of saints. His atonement is easy, almost mechanical. It is hard to see how an indwelling feeling of justice and right conduct can be developed through this kind of atonement process.

Christianity stands or falls on one man, Jesus. Its significant holidays celebrate his birth and death. Jewish holidays, on the other hand, are mostly joyful and full of thanksgiving to God for bountiful harvests and for freedom from physical and religious bondage. On the holiest days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jews face God and themselves. They look into their hearts and souls, examine their deeds, repent and seek to make atonement. There are no magic formulas for achieving salvation. There is only individual probing and rededication and reconsecration before man and before the One God.

I did not formally convert to Judaism until after I married my husband, Moishe. We were married by Dr. Abraham Shinedling, a retired Reform rabbi. No other rabbi in our city would marry us unless I converted first. This I refused to do. I wanted my conversion to Judaism to be completely wholehearted and sincere and not, in any sense, a forced conversion.

Dr. Shinedling, a genuinely dedicated rabbi, gave up much of his own scholarly work for fifteen weeks to teach me Jewish history, the religious rituals of Judaism, and elementary Hebrew. He gave me such a love for everything Jewish that he has inspired me to continue my studies in Jewish lore uninterruptedly ever since. When Dr. Shinedling felt that I had been prepared properly, both scholastically and psychologically, he accepted me into the faith and officiated at my conversion ceremony. I became a daughter of Israel proudly and joyfully.

Shortly after our marriage but before my conversion, I found a book in my husband's library, *College Yiddish*, by Uriel Weinreich of Columbia University. My husband had sent for it some years before, since he thought he would like to learn Yiddish, even though his parents had not spoken it. But the effort required to learn the "aleph-beys" and the grammar discouraged him and he set the book aside. I took it up and began studying it, because I

mistakenly thought that all pious Jewish women speak Yiddish. My progress surprised Moishe and rekindled his interest in the language. Soon we started studying together.

After I discovered that all good Jews do not speak Yiddish, it no longer mattered. I had become excited over a language other Jews take for granted or never bother to learn. I found that through Yiddish I could gain a greater knowledge of Jewish culture and folklore. The language has a feeling of warmth and tenderness. It mirrors life in the Jewish home. It radiates a feeling of love for the family and happy family gatherings.

From reading Sholom Aleichem and Peretz in Yiddish, I learned about the Jewish way of life in the "old country," of the traditions, joys and sorrows of the "shtetl" Jew. From my readings in the Yiddish classics I gained an understanding of and an appreciation for Jewish humor, the "laughter with tears" in the stories of the Jew who, frustrated by his problems, finds relief by laughing at himself.

Peretz wrote that a Jew should know three languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, and the language of the country in which he lives. I wish more Jews in America would speak Yiddish. It is my hope that the Jews will reclaim the riches found in their culture and in the Yiddish language before it is too late.

Any Jew can preserve the real meaning and living spirit of his cultural tradition without becoming one bit less an American. And, if he does not want it for himself, he should at least not deprive his children of the savor of the Yiddish language and the joy of its songs and stories.

Yiddish culture is a precious heirloom, handed down to us through the generations. We cannot, we must not give it up. We must keep it firm and fresh and transmit it to our children, as it has been transmitted to us.

I DID NOT CHANGE MY RELIGION

by

HAROLD N. SCHOTT, JR.

Mr. Schott, who resides in New York City, is a free-lance writer, editor, and artist. This article appeared in *American Judaism* in November 1952.

I did not change my religion. I was a Jew long before my brief conversion ceremony, but I was a strange kind of Jew. I was a Jew without a tradition, without a people, and without a place of worship. In short, I was a man whose theological concepts coincided with those of Reform Judaism, but a man who had reached his beliefs alone, and had no idea an organized group of people shared them.

Essentially then, my conversion joined me to a people, to a way of life I did not know existed, but which I found to embody my own religious beliefs.

Foremost among these beliefs was the conviction that at the base of all human problems there is an ethical problem, a question of how to live, how to know right from wrong. I felt that man's progress should be measured in terms of how well he solved these problems and that the only real progress was ethical progress. Added to this, I felt that ethical insight could come only in a group that made ethical search its central concern. Reform Jews are such a group when they live according to the precepts which they teach.

The very fact that it is "Reform" and not "Reformed" Judaism was significant for me. It demonstrated the possibility of continued change, and it showed that Reform Jews understand that religion is subject to continued re-evaluation and thereby capable of growth and improvement. I had not known of such a group. I shall always be grateful for my discovery, which had its origin in friendship

with a family of knowledgeable Reform Jews. It was this family that paved the way for my first meeting with a Reform rabbi. Thus my discovery of kinship began.

Contrasted with Reform Judaism, the system of values I had inherited was both rigid and otherworldly. Within the bounds of these inherited values I could either live by trite rules of thumb or run off to seek transcendence in a closet. Neither alternative appealed to me.

The time and place in which all of us find ourselves today may be, as many state, chaotic. But in spite of this, I felt that men were moving forward in many fields, and I saw no reason why religious concerns should not be broadened and enriched by these advances. I saw no reason for religion's subservience to the past nor for its belittlement of the present. Yet I was not willing to throw out tradition and place complete emphasis on the present. The ideas inherent in my background gave me no solution. It seemed for the moment that religious tradition and progress were irreconcilable.

It was then that I became acquainted with the tenets of Reform Judaism. I found that I had been walking blindfolded in the midst of potential friends, that many felt as I did about the need for progress in religion. More important still, I discovered that Reform Judaism has not sacrificed tradition to progress. On the contrary, in Reform Judaism they have been united and one gives strength and meaning to the other. Five thousand years of culture and devotion have not hindered the growth of new interpretations, but have nurtured and encouraged them. New ideas have grown on a firm foundation. This simple unity of tradition and progress was truly amazing to me. The background from which I came had declared that this could not be.

Between the ideals in a man's mind and the actual world there is bound to be a gap. But, fortunately, I discovered a group which, while making allowance for the freedom and divergence of its individual members, had maintained a strong sense of unity and continuity with its past. I have found no other religious group like this one.

I had a wish to perfect myself, my understanding, and my rela-

tionship with others. Without a sense of community and common purpose, such an ambition could not be realized. I could not resign myself to a grey view that only stressed responsibility and did not also emphasize opportunities and privileges. To my way of thinking, life is earnest but the world was also meant to be full of richness and concrete delight. Imagine then my happiness at finding a religious body that has among its principles one which stresses the moral obligation to live a spirited as well as a dutiful life.

I belong to a community now, a community that does not depend on geographic location. No, I did not change my religion. I found a place where the religion I already had could grow.

I was, unknowingly, for many years a Jew in mind and in spirit. I am now a Jew in fact. Much yet remains for me to explore, to study, to learn. I am eager for the task.

A PROGRAM FOR THE JEWISH FAMILY

by

DR. JACK TAYLOR

Dr. Jack Taylor is Professor of Economics at the University of Rochester. He is a member of Temple B'rith Kodesh, Rochester, N. Y. This article which he wrote was printed in *American Judaism* in January 1955.

It may seem strange but I hope not impertinent for one not born and brought up a Jew to be suggesting a program for Jewish family living. I married into Judaism and found no family religious problem. My original Anglicanism had become watered down to a vague ethical Christianity devoid of theological content. I found no difficulty in occasionally attending, out of deference to my wife, synagogue services when we lived in London. From the late Rabbi Israel Mattuck, who seemed to me to have more of the Biblical prophet about him than any man I had ever met, I learned much about Judaism. Almost imperceptibly, I was transformed from a gentile sympathizer with Judaism into an avowed adherent. For some years it was possible for me to stay in a somewhat comatose religious condition until, when my own children became of an age to need religious instruction, a decision had to be taken. It seemed perfectly logical for me to become a member of a Reform congregation. Perhaps because of this background of a rather slow but carefully considered conversion to Judaism, my remarks on the subject of a proper Jewish family life may have some pertinence.

I find myself not infrequently asking myself such questions as: What does Judaism mean to my children and to me? Why do I send them to religious school and want them to enjoy their Jewishness? Why do I try, however imperfectly, to make them a proper Seder? Why do I encourage them to savor the privilege as well as the burden of their Jewish inheritance?

The essence of all the answers is platitudinous but nonetheless true: We are the people of the Book. A Jew without Torah is not a Jew. How can I bring up my children as good Jews if I do not try to live a good Jewish life myself? I cannot; nor can I shuffle off onto the school and the rabbi my responsibilities as a parent.

We cannot ride to salvation on another man's back nor yet buy it for our children by paying school taxes and temple dues. My first duty to my children, then, is to try to be a good Jew myself. That means trying to be an informed as well as a practicing Jew, to study Torah, attend services regularly, and to live according to Jewish principles.

We need a regular program for Jewish family life. Our own family prescription, which seems to work reasonably well, has three ingredients:

1. Let there be Jewish books about the house and let them be read and discussed by the family, not used as ornaments. Encourage the children to ask questions, especially on Friday night at the Sabbath meal. Show an interest in their work in the religious school. In short, help them to feel that their religion is not a thing apart but is indivisible from their everyday living.
2. Keep the Sabbath and Holy Days *as a family*. Ceremonies have more than a ritualistic significance for the individual; they are re-enactments of great historic moments in the Jewish past. Our children enter into their inheritance via ceremonies which appeal to their imagination. We have no right to remove this dramatic element from their Jewish heritage.
3. Attend the Temple services *regularly* and *as a family*.

The future of American Judaism will stand or fall on the quality of its home life. How can we hope to succeed as Jewish parents if we ourselves do not study Torah? And, if we study Torah, how may we call ourselves good Jews if we do not carry out its practices and its mandates?

I BELONG TO A SHULE

by

MARIAN WOLFINGER

Mrs. Marian Wolfinger is a member of Congregation Agudath Achim, the Conservative synagogue in Altoona, Pa. She wrote this statement at the request of her good friend, Rabbi A. Elihu Michelson, the former rabbi of Congregation Agudath Achim.

Although I have been asked a thousand times by the curious, the doubtful, and the contemptuous, it is still difficult to determine just how and when it happened. How can one say: On such-and-such a day and for such-and-such a reason, I decided to become a Jew? There are some to whom it appears to be a sudden, divinely inspired act; there are others, less kind, who are quite sure the devil had a hand in it! How does one answer the same question but asked with such diverse undertones by different individuals? It would be good to be sure that Divine guidance was involved but, being of a practical and questioning nature, I know that there was a great deal more to it than the miracle of a moment.

Did it begin when a child rejected the "fairy tale" religion of Santa Claus and the Easter bunny? Were the seeds sown when this child was fascinated and her curiosity aroused by the sound of chanted Hebrew prayers?

There are those, sincerely horrified, who ask, "How could you, a born Christian who taught in a Christian Sunday School, give up everything to become a Jew?" I gave up nothing and gained everything. They are unaware that I taught strictly on the basis of ethics and not from the standpoint of routine theology. They are unaware that, in search of Sunday School lesson information, I attended the Shule on a Friday night (during a time of great

personal difficulty); nor do they know that, at the time, like untold thousands of doubters before me, I was shouting silently within myself: "There is no God!"

Was it coincidence that drew me back to the Shule again and again? Was it the sound of the prayers, recognized as those heard and liked so long before, or was it a yearning for something more? I can only say that there was within me a compulsion and a great need. As I questioned and listened and studied and learned, Judaism and the Synagogue became of vital importance to me. Here I was not told that this book or that one was not for me to understand or even read; I was never discouraged from the study of any book; here I was never denied the right to question and to learn—the only limit, my desire and my ability. The intellectual freedom, the right to form one's own opinions rather than accept the opinion of another, the right to argue and debate, this unique religious freedom, found only in Judaism, is one of the greatest of freedoms.

And to know beyond doubt that the heritage and traditions, the beliefs and the way of life of the Jew are also yours is also good. And to be denied the right to become a Jew can be a most unhappy experience. To be neither fish nor fowl, to be a Jew in every part of one's being yet unaccepted by the Jewish community, is to be left with a sense of aloneness so complete that there seems to be nowhere to turn. Jewish tradition appeared to have no answer for me when I wanted to become a Jew, not by reason of marriage nor for any other worldly reason except that it was right and good for me to do so.

For several years the point was debated with many rabbis. What did one's status at birth or in marriage have to do with religious belief? Why should anyone subscribe to any religion, to any belief or way of life, merely because it was subscribed to by one's family? Since I was already a Jew in thought and in way of life, what difference could it make to any but myself if the fact were made official? What right has anyone to deny another the American freedom to worship as he pleases?

In spite of the sympathy and backing of many loyal friends in

the Jewish community, the fact that I was married to a non-Jew remained, for a long time, an insurmountable barrier for which no solution could be found. It was like being at the bottom of a well with no way out, until a close friend took my case to the rabbis in another city. There, with all the facts in the matter made plain, including my marital status, I was questioned closely; my knowledge of Judaism, of the Hebrew language, and the sincerity of my motives were tested. I passed "with flying colors" and an impressive conversion ceremony was arranged. In moments, or so it seemed, the impossible had been done, the years of disappointment were over, and I achieved that for which I had fought so long. With conversion an accomplished fact, other congregational objections were gradually overcome and, at long last, I became an official member of the synagogue which I had always looked upon as *my* Shule.

Problems? Yes, although the only really important one was overcome at the time the beautiful ceremony of conversion was concluded. There is the tragicomic situation of observing the dietary laws in a home where I am the only Jew; the humorous aspect of this can only be appreciated by another Jew. There is, too, and I believe this must be true with most converts, the need to prove over and over again that one is indeed a Jew—first, to one's fellow Jews who express doubt and wonder and occasionally a disbelief of one's stated motives, and, second, to non-Jews who cannot understand how a convert can possibly be a real Jew like all other Jews.

For those whose tone of voice conveys contempt when they ask why and how, there can never be an answer. They ask not out of curiosity or sincerity but only out of a desire to hurt. Yes, there are small hurts at times, hurts to which one becomes more or less adjusted—small, indeed, in the face of all that has been required of millions of other Jews in our time, so small as to be only fleeting moments in the endless flow of time.

For those whose questions are sincere, there is an answer. How and why does one accept Judaism? One does not accept Judaism. Acceptance implies passivity and there is nothing passive about a

living, vibrant Judaism. One does not accept—rather one reaches out to grasp and to keep.

Judaism is a way of life which permeates every atom of one's being. Judaism is the prayers one says upon awaking in the morning and upon going to bed at night. Judaism is the Shule on Shabbat. Judaism is the observance of Kashrut and the reciting of Shema. Judaism is the joy of Pesach and the solemnity of Yom Kippur. Judaism is at once a peaceful contentment and a constant challenge. It is the recognition of duty and the deep gratitude for the privilege of being a Jew. It is the desire to give of oneself and the knowledge that one can never give enough. It is a love for all things Jewish and the desire to shout from the housetops, "I am a Jew!" Judaism is to answer the doubtful, the curious and the contemptuous with the way I work, the way I pray, the things I do and even the food I eat. For me, being Jewish is to praise God continually, with all my heart and soul and strength, in the language and in the words of my spiritual home

Baruch atta Adonai, Elohenu Melech ha-olam, sh'hecheyanu v'kiyimanu v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has granted me life and has sustained me and has given me the privilege of sharing in the measureless spiritual joys of Thy people. Amen.

BASIC READING LIST FOR INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF JUDAISM

This list of books has been prepared by the editor to help those who are interested in learning more about Judaism. Most of the books included have been selected from lists compiled individually by Rabbis Ira Eisenstein, Albert S. Goldstein, Maurice Lamm, and A. Elihu Michelson. The religious orientation of each author is indicated as follows: (O) Orthodox; (C) Conservative; (R) Reform; (Re) Reconstructionist.

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